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# THE ULTIMATE COMMISSION: THE KEY FOR THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO MATTHEW

## ABSTRACT

It is frequently acknowledged that the ultimate commission is important for understanding the whole gospel of Matthew. In this article, we investigate how several themes incorporated in the ultimate commission (28:18-20) are connected to the whole gospel. Thus readers of Matthew will not be surprised at their encounter with the ultimate commission at the end. The themes within this commission are not sudden, but are already visible in every section of the whole gospel. Having read the gospel from the beginning, readers will be well prepared for the ultimate commission.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

It is frequently acknowledged that the ultimate commission is important in understanding the whole gospel of Matthew (Michel 1995:39-51; Ellis 1974:22-25; Blair 1960:45-47; Trilling 1964:21; Lohmeyer 1956:416; Vögtle 1964:266-294; Bornkamm 1971:205; Meier 1977:407-424; Donaldson 1985:170, 188-190; Bauer 1988:115-127; Krentz 2006:23-41; Brooks 1981:2; Luz 2000:66). Usually, this is called “the ultimate commission”, implying its importance, but we prefer the term “the great commission” to convey the idea that it functions as a driving force in the plot of the book Matthew. To Ellis (1974:22), the ultimate commission is Matthew’s “table of contents” located at the end. To Kupp (1996:201, his italics), it is “the ‘abstract’ for Matthew’s ‘dissertation’” and “a digest and *telos* of the work”. Byrne (2002:57-58) suggests that the beginning and the ending are most significant for understanding the text.

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The location of the ultimate commission at the end of the gospel of Matthew demands our special attention. In recognizing the plot of any literature, “time and causality are major categories for organizing events into plot”, and “in terms of time, the ending of the narrative is of paramount importance” (Matera 1987:241). The ultimate commission could be either the climax or the hortatory epilogue of the whole gospel (Foster 2004:239; Bauer 1988:109-128). Hagner (1995:881) regards it as the conclusion to the whole gospel as well as of the passion-resurrection narrative (cf. Davies & Allison 1997:676). “In a way the conclusion goes back to the start and teaches us to understand the whole gospel, the story of Jesus, “from behind”” (Michel 1995:45). When we see a very complicated movie, we sometimes cannot understand its details until we reach the end. Once we have seen the last scene and watched the movie from the beginning again (or we recall the story with the ending in mind), it becomes clear why some details are located in the movie as they are. Even though France’s (2007:1109) suggestion to read the gospel as it is presented to us and to follow the unfolding sequence of the story is valid in some sense, it *is* the ending which sheds light on every part of the story. The evangelist seems to have written his version of Jesus’ story (cf. Burriage 1998:113-145) with the presupposition that his implied reader already knows the basic story of Jesus. For example, Judas is introduced as the one who betrayed Jesus even before his crucifixion (10:4). Also, Jesus commends the gentile centurion, comparing his faith to that of Jews, even though it seems that Jesus has not yet worked so much among the Jews so far (8:10).

The ending of a book is important to understand the whole. However, it is not always so. So, we shall investigate if the ending of Matthew can serve as the key for the whole gospel. We shall investigate how the themes of the ultimate commission (28:18-20) are connected to the whole gospel.

## 2. THEMES

Whatever the genre of the ultimate commission might be,<sup>1</sup> it is closely linked with the overall scheme of the whole gospel. Readers of Matthew, if they have read Matthew from the beginning to the end with an open mind, will not be surprised at their encounter with the ultimate commission, even when they would read it for the first time. Its themes are not sudden, but are already

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1 Various opinions with regard to literary genre or form (Gattung) have been suggested: a myth (Dibelius 1959:282-285), a cult legend (Bultmann 1968:286), an enthronement hymn (Michel 1995:36-37; Jeremias 1958:38-39; for its critic, cf. Friedrich 1983:137-183; Bauer 1988:111-112), a covenant formula (Frankemölle 1974:43-61), a combination of the royal decrees and the Old Testament prophetic proof pattern (Malina 1970:88-91) and a commission (Hubbard 1974:62-72; also Stuhlmacher 2000:25; for its critic, cf. Hagner 1995:883; Gnillka 1988:502; Bauer 1988:113).

visible in every section of the gospel. While reading the gospel, readers would be well prepared for the ultimate commission. Therefore, Brooks (1981:2) could say that “the author was motivated to produce the work in keeping with” the ultimate commission. It is generally agreed that Matthew has reworked the ultimate commission in a redaction-critical sense (Meier 1977:407-424), whether it is a thorough working (Bultmann 1968:289; Bornkamm 1969:15; Brown 1980:193-221) or a light touch (Beasley-Murray 1962:77-92). Michel (1995:44; cf. Barth 1963:133) also insists that three parts of the ultimate commission were originally independent and were put together by Matthew. Then it is natural to see that the ending corresponds to the whole gospel.

The only possible surprise is the inclusion of “all nations” as the mission target, because at least at the surface level, gentiles seem to be excluded from Jesus’ and his disciple’s mission in two passages (10:5-6; 15:24). The inclusion of the gentiles in Jesus’ ministry is not totally new, however, but already visible in the whole of the gospel (Lee 1999:28-93; Bauer 1988:121-124). Scholars have noticed the co-existence of universalism and particularism (Guthrie 1990:29-30). Also, readers would be prepared in this matter, too (Hubbard 1974:86). For example, we may include Jesus’ birth story, Jesus’ prophecy about the worldwide proclamation of the gospel (24:14) and the inclusion of gentiles in the kingdom of heaven (8:11), Jesus’ ministry in the gentile territory and healing of some gentiles (8:5-13, 28-34; 15:21-28), Jesus’ commending of the gentiles for their good faith (8:10; 15:28), Jesus’ parables showing universalistic tones: the parable of the mustard seed (13:31-32), the parable of the sower (13:38), the parable of vineyard workers (20:1-16), the parable of two sons (21:28-32), the parable of tenants (esp. 21:43), and the parable of the marriage feast (22:9-10). Matthew himself interprets Jesus’ residence at Capernaum as meaningful to the gentiles (4:14-16).

Not only authority and teaching among the themes of the ultimate commission, as Brooks (1981:2-13) insists, but also other elements can be found in the rest of the gospel. As France (2007:1107; see also Stanton 1992:230) rightly notes, “In these few words many of the most central themes of the gospel reach their resolution and culmination.” The motifs and function of the ultimate commission finds parallels in the whole gospel and are relevant for understanding the whole purpose of the gospel of Matthew. These motifs are now discussed successively.

## 2.1 Authority

In the final scene of Matthew, the risen Lord claims all authority in heaven and on earth. The passive implies the divine endowment. Hubbard (1974:69; see also Gaechter 1963:964) classifies this as “divine confrontation” among his

commissioning models. This echoes what is written in Daniel 7:13-14 (Lohmeyer 1956:34; Davies 1964:197; France 1971:142-143; Schaberg 1982:111-141; Fuller 1971:83; Hubbard 1974:69-99; Michel 1995:45-46; Ellis 1974:22; Meier 1980:369; Garland 1993:267; Keener 1999:716). Even though Matthean text transcends the limits of the text in the book of Daniel (Bauer 1988:111-112; Gundry 1994:595), this does not exclude the possibility of allusion to Daniel 7:13-14 (France 2007:1112). Also, allusion to Psalm 2 can be detected in the ultimate commission: The risen Lord stands on the mountain claiming the authority in heaven and on earth (cf. Rengstorf 1962:240). Malina and Rohrbaugh (1992:24) also suggest allusion to 2 Chronicles 36:23.

We cannot tell if the Greek word “authority” is one of Matthew’s favourite words.<sup>2</sup> Numerically viewed, it is used frequently (nine times, 7:29; 8:9; 9:6, 8; 10:1; 21:23, 24, 27; 28:18). However, the case is the same for the other gospels (Meier 1977:410): Mark uses the word nine times, while Luke and John use it sixteen times and eight times respectively. We may say that Matthew retains the word where other gospels use it. There is only one instance where Matthew adds the word where it is not used in Mark or Luke (9:8). In other instances, Matthew omits the word, whereas Mark (13:34) and Luke (4:6; 12:5; 19:17; 20:20; 22:53) use it. Luz (2007:29; see also Davies & Allison 1988:75, 77; Hawkins 1909:5) does not include the word in the list of Matthew’s preferred vocabulary, since he counts “redactionally significant” words only (cf. Donaldson 1985:276, who lists the word as Matthew’s favourite).

The mentioning of authority in the ultimate commission could be Matthew’s redactional work, since there is no parallel in other traditions (Hubbard 1974:78-83)<sup>3</sup> and it coincides with the overall imagery of Jesus throughout Matthew: the one possessing authority (cf. Luz 2005a:624). Therefore, Bauer (1988:115) could say, “Virtually no paragraph escapes the expression of Jesus’ authority.” Already in 11:27, Jesus claims his authority over all. Readers of Matthew will not be surprised, therefore, at the risen Lord’s claim of all authority in heaven and on earth. From the very beginning of Matthew, Jesus is described as the one who has authority. His authority can be seen in his teaching, his miracles, people’s response to him and in his titles and unique position as a divine or Messianic figure (Bauer 1988:115-117). While Jesus’ opponents reject his authority throughout the gospel (11:16; 13:54, 56; 14:1-12; 15:1-12), the author continually emphasizes it directly and indirectly by presenting cases where Jesus’ authority is acknowledged and accepted (14:33; 15:25; 16:16; 17:5).

2 Interestingly, Matthew does not use the word “authority” except for Jesus. For human power, the word *δύναμις* is used (Lawrence 2003:117).

3 There are some parallels with Mark 16:15, although Mark 16:9-20 does not form part of the most reliable early manuscripts.

Jesus' teaching is different from that of contemporary scribes (7:29). He does not rely on higher authorities in his teaching as his contemporaries usually do (cf. *Pirke Avoth* 1:1; *y. Pes.* 6.1.33a; Davies & Allison 1988:726). He does not appeal to Moses, the highest authority in contemporary Judaism (Kasper 1977:102). In his famous six antitheses, Jesus contrasts his own teaching with that of Moses (5:21-48; cf. 15:11-20; 19:3-9). Moreover, three of his antitheses (divorce, oaths, vengeance) "not only radicalize but also revoke the letter of the Torah" (Meier 1976:135; cf. Foster 2004:146-147). Thus, the overall tone of his teaching is authoritative. He is described as superior to Moses (Ellis 1974:24-25). He insists on having come to fulfil the law (5:17-18). This also implies the authority of Jesus, since here "adherence to Jesus" is suggested as "the ultimate way of 'fulfilling' the law" (Foster 2004:186; Viljoen 2006b:140). In the beatitudes (5:3-12), Jesus appears to be the authoritative one who defines who is blessed and who is not. He boldly insists that blessed are those who are persecuted *because of him* (5:11). Even those who reject Jesus' teaching acknowledge his power and wisdom in his teaching (13:54).

All Jesus' miracles show his authority over nature (4:23-24; 8:2-4, 5-13, 14-15, 23-27, 28-34; 9:2-7, 18-19, 20-22, 23-26, 27-31, 32-33, 35; 11:5; 12:10-13, 22; 14:14, 15-21, 25, 35-36; 15:21-28, 29-31, 32-38; 17:14-18; 19:2; 20:29-34; 21:18-20). Matthew's collection of miracle stories has a clear "Christological function" (Barth 1963:246), although ecclesiastical and sociological elements are present, too. Gundry (1994:137) titles a section from 8:1 to 9:34 as "The Authority of Jesus." Jesus' miraculous power demonstrates that the kingdom of heaven has come and also that Jesus is the one with authority to cast out demons with the Spirit of God (12:28). His authority is acknowledged by many, including a Roman centurion (8:8), demons (8:29), Herod the tetrarch (14:2) and the crowds (9:8). Jesus himself insists that the Son of Man has the authority to forgive sins on the earth (9:6; cf. 26:28), which can be interpreted as "claiming the divine status," i.e. "blaspheming" to the ears of his contemporaries (9:3). Jesus is depicted as the one with the highest authority who can bestow and distribute his authority to his disciples (10:1, 8).

Throughout the gospel, Jesus is presented as the one who people should follow (4:18-22, 25; 8:18-22; 9:9; 10:1-4, 38; 11:28-30; 12:15, 30; 16:25; 19:27-30) and worship (2:1-12; 4:11; 8:2, 15; 9:18; 14:33; 15:25; 20:20; 21:14-16; 27:55; 28:9).<sup>4</sup> His authoritative position is also presupposed in his teaching on who can enter the kingdom of heaven (7:21-23). People will come to him and say "Lord, Lord", which suggests recognition of the significance of Jesus as the judge of the world (Nolland 2005:339; Luz 2007:379).

4 In the New Testament, the object of worship is always holding divine status (Greeven 1971:763).

Acknowledging Jesus before men is the decisive factor to be acknowledged before God (10:32-33; cf. Tödt, 1965:90). Jesus is so precious that people should endure persecution for his sake (5:11-12; 10:18-23; 24:9). He is even more important than one's own family members or one's own life (10:34-39; 19:29). His disciples are required to take their own cross and to follow him (10:38). Anyone who loses his life for Jesus will find it (10:39). Receiving Jesus' disciples is equivalent to receiving him, which is also equivalent to receiving God (10:40; 18:4).

Jesus occupies a divine or Messianic position. Kingsbury (1974:583) avers that the Christological title "Son of God" is "the key element that gives unity to the first main part of Matthew's gospel", and the end corresponds to the beginning. Jesus is born as the promised son (1:1, 16, 18-23).<sup>5</sup> His birth is the fulfillment of the prophecy of Isaiah 7:14. Matthew presents Jesus as the fulfillment of the Old Testament prophecies (cf. Menken 2004). Especially, eleven fulfillment quotations are prominent in Matthew (1:22; 2:15, 17, 23; 4:14-16; 8:17; 12:17-21; 13:35; 21:4-5; 26:53-56; 27:9-10) (Viljoen, 2007:302). Closely related to Jesus' divine status is the awe expressed by those who encountered him. The crowds marvel at Jesus' miraculous healing (9:8). The Gergesenes express their awe by asking Jesus to leave their region (8:34; cf. Luke 5:8; Isaiah 6:5). Jesus' disciples are terrified at the scene of transfiguration (17:6). The centurion and those who are with him are also filled with awe (27:54). Jesus seems to have replaced the role of Torah in 7:24-27: Elisha ben Abuyah's parable compares a person who has learned Torah with the builder who has built his house on the rock (Luz 2007:386). Also, Jesus' promise to abide with the church (18:20) seems to claim the position of the Shekinah: *m. Abot* 3.6 and *Mek. Exod.* on 20:24 mentions the Shekinah's presence among human beings when they gather (Luz 2001:459).

Jesus claims that he has come to fulfill the law and the prophets (5:17). Jesus' answer to the question raised by John the Baptist is affirmative (11:2-5). Matthew presents John the Baptist as the preparer of Jesus' way (3:1-17; 11:10). John the Baptist introduces Jesus as mightier than he (3:11). Jesus also claims that he is the bridegroom (9:15) and the Lord of the Sabbath (12:8). He also insists that he is more ultimate than the temple (12:6), Jonah (12:41), and Solomon (12:42). He claims that he has the power to forgive sins (9:6; cf. 26:28). In the six antitheses, Jesus implies that he is even more

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5 Cf. Nolland (1996:3-12) for his opinion that in the nativity story no Son of God Christology can be found. He insists that 1:18-25 is just talking about "the initiative of God in the incorporation of Jesus into the line of David." However, "the incorporation of Jesus into the line of David" itself is linked with the Son of God Christology! For the opinion that we can find the Son of God Christology, cf. Gundry (1994:20), Luz (2007:121), Kingsbury (1986:649; 1988:51-52), Brown (1987:489; 1993:134-138; 601-603), Musies (1988:177-86), Davies & Allison (1988:212), Moloney (1992:349-350).

ultimate than Moses (5:21-48; Ellis 1974:24-25). Jesus builds his church so that the gates of Hades will not overcome it (16:18) and gives Peter the keys of the kingdom of heaven (16:19). He is the one who rewards each person in the end (16:27). Jesus claims his authority to clean the temple (21:23-27). Jesus identifies himself as the Son of Man (8:20; 9:6; 10:23; 11:19; 12:8, 32, 40; 13:37, 41; 16:13, 27, 28; 17:9, 22; 19:28; 20:18, 28; 24:27, 30, 37, 39, 44; 25:31; 26:2, 24, 45, 64). He is also called Christ (1:1, 16, 17, 18; 2:4; 11:2; 16:16, 20; 26:63-64, 68; 27:17, 22) and the Lord (7:21-23; 8:2, 6, 8, 21, 25; 9:28; 12:8; 14:28, 30; 15:22, 25, 27; 16:22; 17:4, 15; 18:21; 20:30, 31, 33; 21:3, 9). Jesus' claim to authority in the ultimate commission is closely related to the disciples' worshipping of him (28:17), which is also prepared throughout Matthew (2:11; 8:2; 9:18; 14:33; 15:25; 20:20; 28:9).

The fact that Jesus is introduced as the Son of God in Matthew is closely linked with his authoritative status. When Jesus is baptized and goes up from the water, there is a voice from heaven declaring Jesus as God's Beloved Son (3:17). This Christological title is immediately challenged by the devil (4:1-11). Jesus rejects the tester's request to prove his sonship, and he gains the authority over all the heaven and the earth by obeying the Father (France 1985:413; Luz 2005a:621). Matthew confirms Jesus' status as the Son of God by adding the description that angels are ministering to him after the devil has left (4:11). Jesus' special relationship with God the Father is expressed in his praise (11:27): The Son and the Father know each other, while no one knows the Son or the Father. To the question of the identity of Jesus, Peter answers that Jesus is "the Christ, the Son of the living God" (16:16). This is confirmed again in the transfiguration (17:5). Jesus claims his status as the Son when the temple tax is at issue (17:25-27). Two parables about sonship (21:28-32, 33-46) supplement Jesus' claim to authority from heaven (Brooks, 1981:13). In answer to the question of the high priest, Jesus affirms that he is the Son of God (26:63-64). At the cross, through the lips of the centurion and those who are with him, Jesus' sonship is confirmed (27:54).

The author of the gospel skilfully exposes Jesus' authority at the moment of execution. Jesus' authority is mocked by the people (27:28-29, 39-44), with the sign over the cross (27:37) and by the centurion's confession (27:54).<sup>6</sup> Ironically, however, the sign and the confession reveal his authority. Also, the tearing of the temple curtain, the opening of the tombs, the earthquake (27:51-54) and, finally, the resurrection confirm his authority.

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6 Cf. Sim (1993:401-24) who argues that the soldiers' acknowledgment of Jesus as the Son of God is intended as a cry of defeat in the face of divine power. I agree to his thinking that 27:54 cannot be used as evidence for pro-gentile bias in Matthew. This can be viewed, however, as the last taunting, similar to the sign on the cross, from the soldiers, which was ironically used by Matthew for Jesus' vindication (cf. Bullinger 1968:807).

To sum up, throughout the whole gospel Matthew describes Jesus as the one with authority, and readers of Matthew have been prepared for and will not be surprised at the risen Lord's claim that all authority has been given him (Brooks 1981:14). Therefore, the risen Lord's claim to authority in the ultimate commission is the culmination and climax of what Matthew has depicted about Jesus so far and the key to interpreting the former descriptions about Jesus. As France rightly thinks, this is "the culmination of the theme of kingship which was introduced by the Davidic royal genealogy (1:1-17), developed in the magi's search for the 'king of the Jews'." Before the resurrection, Jesus is sometimes depicted as weak (4:2; 8:24; 26:37-39; 27:26-50). However, the perspective from the ultimate commission makes readers reinterpret or complement those imageries based on the risen Lord's claim of authority. To Matthew's community, Jesus occupies the one and only "authoritative figure" (Overman 1996:403).

Can we detect a progressive change of Jesus' status in Matthew? In line with the idea of distinguishable epochs of "before and after the resurrection" in the gospel (Strecker 1962:86-93; Trilling 1964:215; Carlston 1975:9; Kingsbury 1973:471), Levine (1988:166-178) argues that the content of Jesus' authority has been changed. Before the resurrection, according to her, his authority is derivative and "limited" (9:8; 26:53). Later, in the ultimate commission, he *now* claims the full authority.

Indeed Jesus' authority was hidden or concealed before the resurrection. This does not mean, however, that his authority was limited, as Levine insists. By naming Jesus as Immanuel who has fulfilled the Old Testament's prophecy (1:23) and other stories surrounding his birth, Matthew tries to tell his readers that Jesus has been the Son of God from the very beginning.

## 2.2 Discipleship

According to Hubbard's reconstruction of the proto-commissioning (1974:131), the commandment to preach can be found in the tradition. Here, Matthew has chosen the word "make disciples" instead of the word "preach." Brooks (1981:4) thinks this is done "in keeping with the design of his gospel".

In the final scene of the book of Matthew, the risen Lord commands his disciples to go and make disciples of all nations. Even μαθητεύσατε is the only word used in the imperative and others are in participles, baptizing and teaching are not instrumental in accomplishing the ultimate goal of making disciples. Being a kind of parallelismus membrorum, they are used as "participles of identical action" and probably express the same idea of the verb in the imperative from different aspects (Burton 1998: 55). They are "a twofold connotation" (Brooks 1981:4) or the description (Grundmann 1968:578-579)



of making disciples. These three verbs do not necessarily convey the idea of sequence. Baptizing and teaching may not be regarded as preliminary steps leading to making disciples.

To become Jesus' disciples or to follow Jesus is not new, but well attested in the antecedent part of the gospel of Matthew. There are many followers of Jesus in Matthew. Jesus calls some of them directly (4:18-22; 9:9; 10:1-4; 19:27). Some of them hear the news about Jesus and voluntarily follow him (4:23-25; 8:1, 10; 12:15; 14:13; 19:2; 20:29). Some of them follow him to seek healing (9:27; 12:15). Some of them follow him after having encountered Jesus' miraculous healings (20:34). Some of them follow and venerate him (21:9). Some of them follow him even to the moment of his death (27:55).

Following Jesus or being disciples of Jesus is not just a step for another and more important purpose, but his message and goal in itself (8:18-22; 10:38; 11:28-30). It seems that Jesus' preparation of the twelve "had apparently ended in irreversible disaster in 26:56", but they are now restored in the end (France 2007:1107). Even though it is with the ultimate commission that Jesus apparently asks his disciples to make disciples of others, people gather around and follow Jesus. Jesus defines how to follow him (8:18-22; 10:24-25; 16:24-25) and what the rewards are for the disciples (19:27-30). Therefore, the command to make disciples of others is not totally new to Matthean readers. Rather, the ultimate commission guides us to interpret the whole gospel from the perspective of making disciples. Jesus proclaims the kingdom of heaven and calls people to his kingdom. People gather around him. The whole gospel is full of imageries of people following Jesus.

There are missionary outlooks in Matthew. The magi go to Jerusalem to venerate the newborn King, although their action is centripetal in character (2:1-12). John the Baptist also appears on the scene and preaches the kingdom of heaven to his contemporaries (3:1-12). Jesus' ministry includes preaching the good news of the kingdom (4:17, 23; 9:35; 11:1). Jesus sends his disciples to the people of Israel (10:5-6). Jesus encourages his disciples to pray for harvest workers (9:35-38). Disciples are compared to salt and light (5:13-16), which "reflect a missionary outlook" (Foster 2004:182; cf. Gundry 1994:76). The worldwide proclamation of the gospel is presupposed in Matthew (24:14; 26:13).

## 2.3 Teaching and the law

Teaching all nations to obey the commandments of Jesus should not be regarded as a *means* of achieving a more ultimate goal of making disciples, as if teaching is different from making disciples in essence (*pace* Gnilka 1988:508; Schweizer 1975:532; Hagner 1995:886-887; Kingsbury 1974:573-584; Hubbard 1974:73; McNeile 1915:435). Teaching all nations to obey all that Jesus has

commanded them is another expression of making disciples of them (Overman 1996:404). Trilling (1964:40) rightly defines that the disciple is “one who has been baptized and observes the commands of Christ.” Stuhlmacher (2000:32) also defines the disciples as “the special recipients of the instruction, which Jesus, the one Messianic teacher, gave them”. Becoming Jesus’ disciple is closely related to learning from him (Brooks 1981:4). Therefore, making disciples of all nations is definitely related to teaching them to obey what Jesus is teaching. In that sense, this theme of making all nations obey the commandments of Jesus is attested throughout the whole gospel, as the theme of “following Jesus” or “becoming Jesus’ disciples” is prevalent throughout the gospel. What is applicable to following Jesus is also in many ways applicable to observing Jesus’ commandments. Therefore, when Jesus calls his twelve disciples (4:18-22; 9:9; 10:1-4; 19:27), he also teaches them. Jesus’ call to follow is linked with followers learning (11:28-30). Reversely, Matthew’s descriptions of Jesus’ teaching are followed by the forming of many followers (4:23-25; 8:1; 12:9-15; 19:1-2).

We find not only five big teaching blocks (5:1-7:29; 10:5-42; 13:1-52; 18:1-35; 24:3-25:46), but also other teachings here and there throughout the gospel. It is interesting that the scribes, the Pharisees and the Sadducees (8:19 9:11; 12:38; 22:16, 23-24, 34-36),<sup>7</sup> the collectors (17:24), a seeker (19:16), and Judas, his betrayer (26:25, 49) call or designate Jesus as teacher. Jesus identifies himself as a teacher (10:24-25; 23:8; 26:18). Teaching is one of Jesus’ main tasks (4:23; 5:2; 9:35; 11:1; 13:54; 21:23; 22:16; 26:55). Matthew uniquely applies the Christological description of “an authoritative Teacher” to Jesus (Yieh 2004:7-93; Byrskog 1994). His teaching is so different and powerful that the crowds are astonished at his teaching (7:28-29; cf. 13:54).

The emphasis on obeying what Jesus teaches is clearly visible throughout the whole gospel. John the Baptist and Jesus urge the listeners to bear good fruit (3:8, 10; 7:15-20; 12:33; 13:19-23; 21:43). Jesus himself obeys the law by rejecting the devil’s requests (4:1-11). Jesus emphasizes the importance of obedience (7:21, 24-27; 12:46-50; cf. 17:5). Jesus’ warning not to follow the teachings of the Pharisees (16:12) is also noteworthy in this regard.

Can we find a change here, too? Levine (1988:178; see also Kupp 1996: 215) insists that, before the ultimate commission, disciples are not allowed to teach, and it is reserved for Jesus only. However, preaching and teaching are so “closely related” (Schaberg 1982:2; Brown 1978:76; Kingsbury 1973:20-21; Strecker 1962:126-128) that Levine’s case cannot be established. We cannot say that the absence of the word “to preach” in the ultimate commission excludes preaching activity. The two words go side by side, even though one of them is missing. Likewise, teaching is assumed in preaching.

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7 The tone of some addresses could be negative (Nolland 2005:364; Kingsbury 1988:45-59; Luz 2001:33).

## 2.4 Baptism

Readers will be a little surprised at the mention of baptism itself in the last scene in Matthew, since we have not seen it mentioned except once by John so far (3:5-17; cf. 21:23-27). Apart from this, we do not have clear information in Matthew whether Jesus orders his disciples to be baptized or to baptize. Why has the baptism suddenly become an important issue at the end? This question, together with the Trinitarian formula<sup>8</sup> used in the baptism, makes scholars think that this is an adaptation from later ecclesiastical practice (Bultmann 1968:252; Meier 1980:371; France 1985:415). However, the Trinitarian language should not be regarded as a later creation of the church, since already in Paul (1 Corinthians 12:4-6; 2 Corinthians 13:14) this form is used (Fee 1994:839-842). Keener (1999:717) and France (2007:1118) suggest a possibility to trace this formula back to the risen Lord.

France (2007: 1116) argues that the practice of baptism is adopted in the Jesus movement from the beginning, even though no mention is made of it in the narratives. Probably “the lack of explanation of baptism here ... is to be explained by the fact that ... the practice was already familiar to the disciples” (France 1994: 94-111).

If we take baptism as one side of the coin, which also has “making disciples” as its other side, then the baptism is not a new element. Becoming disciples of Jesus would be accompanied by baptism. In the first century, ritual immersion was used as a religious initiation rite in the Second Temple period, even though its primary role was to remove the uncleanness (Taylor 1997:67; Keener 1999:119-122). When John the Baptist appears on the stage, nobody questions the meaning of the baptism (Adams 1975:6). Practice of ritual purity in the Second Temple period might have provided the contemporaries a background to understand John’s baptism (Taylor 1997:15-48). Therefore, even though Matthew does not mention baptism before the ultimate commission, it might be due to the familiarity of the practice in the Jesus movement. This can be supplemented by the following considerations.

First, John the Baptist introduces Jesus as the one who will baptize the people with the Holy Spirit and fire (3:11). Second, he mentions that it could be right for him to be baptized by Jesus, not *vice versa* (3:14). Third, Jesus’ message is exactly the same as that of John the Baptist (4:17). Fourth, Jesus sends out the twelve to the lost sheep of Israel with the same message (10:7). John proclaims the same message (3:2) to invite his hearers to the baptism for repentance

8 Kosmala (1965:132-147; see also Hagner 1995:887-888) argues that the shorter form (baptism in “my name”), as can be found in Eusebius, represents the original text of Matthew. Schaberg (1982:27-29; see also Hubbard 1974:151-75; France 2007:1117) thinks, however, that the shorter form of Eusebius was just “abbreviated allusions”.

(3:6, 11). Fifth, John is remembered when Herod hears about Jesus (14:1-2). Sixth, many people see a figure of John the Baptist through Jesus (16:14), even though Matthew does not seem to give the primacy to John's image in Jesus as in Mark 8:28 (Nolland 2005:659). Seventh, in the other gospel, it is reported that Jesus (actually his disciples) performed baptism more than John (John 3:26; 4:1-2). Therefore, although the mention of baptism in the ultimate commission seems a little abrupt, it is not totally foreign to the first readers of Matthew. The first readers of Matthew would not have been surprised at this.

Readers of Matthew would be prepared for the baptism in the Trinitarian formula, too. Throughout the whole gospel, Jesus is depicted as a divine figure, as we have investigated in the previous section (Keener 1999:716-717). Also the following considerations can be taken as supplementary evidence. First, John the Baptist introduces Jesus as the one who will baptize with the Holy Spirit (3:11; cf. Overman 1996:409). Second, at the scene of Jesus' baptism by John, we are told that the trinity was present (3:16-17). Even though the baptism in the Trinitarian formula is not clearly mentioned before the ultimate commission, the readers of Matthew will not be surprised at its introduction.

## 2.5 Immanuel

The risen Lord promises his disciples to be with them to the end of the age. This reflects the Immanuel theme of 1:23 (cf. Kupp 1996:101). These two make the *inclusio* frame (Viljoen 2006a:242-262; Bauer 1988:124-125; Luz 2005b:4). In between them, Jesus' promise to be in the midst of the church appears at 18:20 (see Trilling 1964:42; Frankemölle 1974:32-33). Thus, the apparent Immanuel theme appears three times in Matthew, and we cannot ignore the importance of the theme in the Matthean narrative (Combrink 1983:77). The whole story of Jesus in Matthew, however, is a commentary of the Immanuel theme. In Matthew, Jesus is the Son of God (1:1, 16, 18-23), the Son of Man (8:20; 9:6; 10:23; 11:19; 12:8, 32, 40; 13:37, 41; 16:13, 27, 28; 17:9, 22; 19:28; 20:18, 28; 24:27, 30, 37, 39, 44; 25:31; 26:2, 24, 45, 64), Christ (1:1, 16, 17, 18; 2:4; 11:2; 16:16, 20; 26:63-64, 68; 27:17, 22) and the Lord (7:21-23; 8:2, 6, 8, 21, 25; 9:28; 12:8; 14:28, 30; 15:22, 25, 27; 16:22; 17:4, 15; 18:21; 20:30, 31, 33; 21:3, 9). When Jesus as a divine figure exists among his people, miraculous works happen among them (4:23-24; 8:2-4, 5-13, 14-15, 23-27, 28-34; 9:2-7, 18-19, 20-22, 23-26, 27-31, 32-33, 35; 11:5; 12:10-13, 22; 14:14, 15-21, 25, 35-36; 15:21-28, 29-31, 32-38; 17:14-18; 19:2; 20:29-34; 21:18-20). Not only the *inclusio* frame, but also the whole story of Jesus in Matthew, is related to Immanuel. Therefore, the readers of Matthew will not be surprised at Jesus' promise to be with his disciples to the end of the age in the ultimate commission. Jesus is always there with them throughout the whole gospel. His resurrection also guarantees his continuous role as Immanuel.

In the mission discourse, we also find the Immanuel theme in Jesus' promise of abiding presence or reassurance for the mission (10:24-42). Jesus encourages his disciples not to fear those who can kill the body but not the soul (10:28), because everything is in God's control (10:29-31). Also, Jesus expresses his solidarity with his apostles (10:40-42). All these expressions are closely linked with the Immanuel theme (cf. Brooks 1981:9).

### 3. CONCLUSIONS

The themes of the ultimate commission are closely linked to the rest of the gospel. We have found that all the themes of the ultimate commission can be found here and there in the gospel. The themes of the ultimate commission may not be sudden and new, even to the first-time readers. They are prepared continually from every part of the gospel to accept the final declaration of the ultimate commission. Even though there are some complications in the former part, the ultimate commission gives us the key to solve them.

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