

The great commission

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Date: 15 January 2023

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[0 : 00] Our reading this evening is from Matthew chapter 28. Matthew 28 at verse 16.

Reading through to the end of the chapter. Matthew 28 at verse 16. Then the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had told them to go.

When they saw him, they worshipped him, but some doubted. Then Jesus came to them and said, All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.

Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.

And surely I am with you always to the very end of the age. Well, the passage that was read for many believers, I think it's a well-known passage.

[1 : 19] This passage, we find Christ speaking to his disciples after the resurrection.

In the morning, we're talking about the resurrection. So this is after the resurrection, and he is about to ascend or to go into heaven.

Someone has said, for an author of a book, there are two important parts of a book.

It is its beginning, the introduction, and its conclusion. So if we are to think of authors as looking at the beginning of a book, and its conclusion as important, we also here find something almost similar in terms of how Christ puts about the message that's important to his disciples.

This message that we find at the Mount of Olives when he's about to ascend, and Christ gives the disciples the message that he wants them to take to heart as he leaves his earthly ministry into the heavenly realms.

[2 : 53] So it is a passage that for disciples, that has to be taken to heart, and has to be understood in terms of its importance in the whole scheme of what God is doing in history through his disciples.

As I've said, the message that I have this evening is not a message for those who do not believe, because this is a message for those who believe.

It was a message given to Christ's disciples. We see that as we read that passage, sorry, I'm turning back.

I'm assuming the passage is at the back, but it's still there. Is it okay if I have the passage just up there? Aha.

Then we are told there, Then the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus told them to go. When they saw him, they worshipped him.

[3 : 59] Here, what we need to understand is, yes, the passage says there were eleven disciples, but if you read in the other Synoptic Gospels, it just says also the disciples.

So we need also to have an understanding that when we see in Scripture where it says disciples, we mustn't always assume that it's the eleven, or earlier on it was the twelfth before Judas Iscariot killed himself.

Jesus said more than twelve disciples. Jesus had more than twelve disciples, but the ones that were prominent, the ones that were prominent are the twelve, minus one at this time.

But we are assuming that at Mount Olive, there are not only eleven disciples. There are more than eleven disciples there. Although in this text that we have in Matthew, Matthew talks about the eleven disciples.

So, what we have in this disciple, Matthew does not hide one embarrassing detail in this text. We see there he says, when they saw Jesus from a distance, they worshipped him.

[5 : 20] As we move from there, the second part, or the last part of that verse, he says, some doubted. The text does not tell us what was the reason of that doubt, what brought about that doubt.

But the writer of the text, Matthew, he doesn't hide this embarrassing detail, that when they saw the risen Christ, at a distance, some doubted.

what could have caused some to doubt? And what's the object, or the subject of that doubt?

Here, some theologians believe that some, when they saw him coming, the element of worshipping him, could some have said, can we worship this Jesus, this Jesus that we see?

Can we worship him? Remember, most of these disciples that we had in the first century, especially this time, were coming from the Jewish background.

[6 : 43] And Judaism, or where they were coming from, Judaism was radically monotheistic. There was belief in one God.

And their belief of a Messiah was different from our Christian understanding of the Messiah. Their belief of the Messiah was someone who was human, but had supernatural powers, or had more powers than what human beings had.

So, that's a big difference between Christianity and Orthodox Judaism, or the way that they understood the nature of the Messiah. So, could it have been that some of them seeing the risen Christ would have had this doubt in their head, what do we do?

Do we worship him? Or we don't? So, there could have been that element of doubt in terms of some thinking, oh, should we worship him?

What's called the Israel Shema, or the prayer, the Jewish Shema, the prayer that Jews make even before the coming of Christ in his earthly ministry, they would pray twice a day in the morning and the evening.

[8 : 04] One of the things that they used to pray based on a text out of Deuteronomy was, here, O Israel, the Lord God is one God.

So, could there have been an element among them of which they thought should be? But, here's the good news here.

This would have been the right opportunity for Christ to say to them, no, you cannot worship me.

The text does not go, does not, Christ does not in the text tell them to stop worshipping him.

Remember, in Christian theology or as well as in Judaism where we have our Old Testament coming from, only God can be worshipped.

No human being can be worshipped or any being that's got supernatural powers. Only God can be worshipped.

[9 : 14] If you think of Christ's ministry, one of the things that the Sadducees and the Pharisees often say to him was, are you saying you are God? Are you saying you are God?

that was the question. When you come to say, no, I did not come to abandon the lie, I came to fulfill it. Only God could do that.

So, we see that Christ here is affirming who he is as part of what now is Christians we know, that Trinitarian formula we have of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

And as we look into that text, at the bottom of that text, Christ goes on to give that baptismal formula, affirming his identity that he is who he is.

He goes on and gives the baptismal formula at the bottom of that text, where he says, therefore, as you go, we baptize in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

[10 : 25] So, he takes us back into the Trinity. He affirms who he is. So, the worship, yes, he has to be worshipped.

But Matthew does not remove that embarrassing fact that some doubted. or could they have doubted because he was at a distance because the text tells us that he then came close.

But what we know is after he gives the commission, when we look at what the disciples do after he gives the commission, you can see that that doubt had disappeared after they seen the risen Christ and he goes into heaven.

We have, in terms of Christian tradition, you look at the life of Peter. We are told that Peter later on was basically crucified.

crucified. If Peter doubted that Christ was not who he is, would he have gone to be crucified for someone that he believed was not who he was?

[11 : 48] These early disciples, or who later became apostles, were not gullible people. They had seen the risen Christ and they knew what they had seen.

we have Paul who later comes on. We're at the beginning, at this time Paul was not even part of the disciples because Paul comes in later.

He starts as a person who's crucifying believers. He starts as a, not crucifying, sorry, as a person who's validating the killing of believers Christians.

Within the Jewish law, where blasphemy was basically part of the crimes that they were ascribing to Christians because for them, they were saying, Jesus is not the Messiah.

So, if you thought that Jesus was the Messiah, it was also against their Jewish teaching. So, we have the question of early disciples, a disciple like Stephen, being stoned to death and Paul was there validating that, yes, Stephen had broken the law and he had to be, that was his bread and butter at the beginning, Paul.

[13:12] But, later on, this Paul, whose main business is making sure that he's validating the killing of Christians, meets Christ on the road to Damascus, he's converted.

And, later on, Christian tradition also tells us, this Paul, who started, who did not accept Christianity, is beheaded.

Because he was a Roman citizen, Romans were not crucified, Romans would be beheaded. So, Christian tradition tells us that Paul was beheaded.

But, what I'm trying to show here is that these people that, part of this group that Matthew described, describes as having some of them had doubts, we don't know where the doubt was coming from.

When we see how their life ends, eventually, there is no element of doubt. Who dies for something that they believe to be untrue?

[14:28] Who dies for a fake story? These men were not gullible. So, we then realize that at some point, the few that he doubts, definitely the doubts disappeared.

but, what's then fascinating is, as we move from this section where we are told that some doubted, Christ says to them, all authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.

Therefore, go make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you, and surely I am with you always to the very end of the age.

So, this is what's critical here. The message that he gives to the disciple at his point of departure that they have to go and make disciples in every nation.

There is no gospel for one nation that is different from another nation. There's no gospel for the rich.

[16:07] There's no gospel for the poor. There's no gospel for Africa, and there's no gospel for Europe. There's one gospel. It is the same gospel that saves all.

Christ says, go make disciples. In fact, a closer reading for those that have done the Greek, they say the text says, therefore as you go, make disciples.

This is slightly a different understanding from the traditional understanding where some people understood Christ is saying, therefore, go and make disciples.

The emphasis is on making disciples. It assumes that some people will go in far away lands to make disciples. But also, it assumes that there will be some people living their lives, doing their job or their workplaces as disciples went back to their homes.

Some of them, they were expected there to make disciples. In the past, the church has looked at the whole issue and there was an emphasis of go, go, go.

[17:42] But the emphasis there is on making disciples. Therefore, as you go about doing your business, it kind of changes a little bit the way people need to understand there.

Because in the past, we looked at missionaries and those missionaries were people that were going to far away lands and were saying, oh yeah, they are obeying what Christ says.

But the text is saying, anyone who says loves Jesus, anyone who is Jesus' disciple, he has this responsibility of making disciples.

As we go about doing our everyday activities, this kind of changes, shifts a little bit the way we should understand how disciples are men.

if you are a teacher, you find opportunities where you work. If you are a taxi driver, when opportunities arise, you find opportunities where you work.

[18:57] Christ says, therefore, as you go, make disciples of all nations.

if an opportunity arises when you are shopping, are you able to share?

it is the responsibility of everyone who loves Jesus. We are told there, he says, to the very end of the age.

So, that last phrase qualifies that everyone, before that happens, the very end of the age, or the second coming of Christ, all those who are in between, from the first generation of disciples, to those that will be there at the final call, are to get involved in the family business.

That's the family business for Christians, making disciples. The discipleship of nations.

[20 : 17] The elements that are involved in the Great Commission involve evangelism and discipleship. Those are the key elements that are involved. Evangelism, that's you and I reaching out with the gospel.

You and I reaching out with the gospel. We do not convert, no, that's God's task. our job is to reach out with the gospel.

God is the one who gives life to a dead heart. He is the one that makes a person turn.

He is the one that makes a person to begin to acknowledge Jesus Christ. Christ says, if they say no to the message that you're sharing, they're not saying no to you, they're saying no to Christ.

I don't feel too bad. I feel sorry when someone says no, but when they say no, if another opportunity arises, the next person, I share with the next person.

[21 : 38] God is the one who converts. the God who converts is the one who has given you and I that responsibility. It is a command.

The commission is a command. It is a responsibility for each and every person who says yes to Christ. To each and every person who says, I believe in the lordship of Jesus Christ.

He's my lord and personal savior. it is the responsibility for each and every believer. It is that understanding that humanly speaking, if we are to think of your forefathers, what they did in places like Africa, South America, Asia, that's the faith that they had and the understanding that they had, that sets the world on fire in terms of people accepting Christ.

At the moment, I was reading the newsletter that the preacher sent through, which was saying 33% of all evangelicals in the world are in Africa.

that work was started humanly speaking by your forefathers who went to do missions, who took it seriously.

[23 : 15] But as I say, yes, it was good what they did, but also for us who don't feel we've got that call to go out or to go into exotic places to preach the word.

Our responsibility is to reach out to people around us with the gospel. It is our responsibility. The beginning of the journey starts with you saying yes to Christ.

As an individual, when you have received Christ, you go through a process of being discipled yourself, learning scripture or participating in learning scripture, that's how it's carried out.

And sometimes seeing examples of other believers, how they live through life, that's all part of being discipled. And when you are discipled yourself, it also becomes your responsibility to disciple others.

The making of disciples or evangelism does not only lie with elders and ministers. The Bible says their role is for them to equip us for that work.

[24 : 42] Paul says to Timothy, do not neglect the job of being an evangelist. Do not neglect that responsibility.

In the text that we have read, we have been given the what for the believer. What shall we do? we are to make disciples, to reach out, make disciples of all nations, basically everyone, as we go about doing our business.

We have been given the what. What about the how? The text does not give us the how, the strategies, the plans. I believe God has left it to us to suit our personalities.

in how we do it. But, there is no option in the text of not doing anything. That option is not there for those who love you.

The how. You have some people that believe that friendship evangelism are the best. Well, I say amen, but it's not the only strategy.

[26 : 06] you have some people that believe I will take my guitar and go on the streets and play my guitar and people that come. I say, if that's your call and that's what you feel God is calling you to, amen.

But someone might look at it and say, it's a no-no. I wouldn't be able to be the kind of person that can go and strum my guitar in the middle of Soki Hall Street for passes by.

You might be the kind of believer who's quite good within evangelizing among friends. There are some people that they find it's difficult to reach out to the gospel, other people also, but anyone that

they become friends with, they get in contact with, they find it easy to share.

The how is not given in the text. The what is given. I believe the how God leaves it to us looking at our personalities and also people react differently to different personalities.

But the text is no option for doing nothing. people pray for revival. I say, Amen.

[27 : 33] It's good to pray for revival. But as Paul says, are you doing the work of the evangelist? The whole story about Lazarus and the rich man, when Christ says, the rich man says, can you send someone from heaven to go and tell the people down there to change?

Christ says, they have the prophets with them down there. Even if someone comes from the dead, they will not accept.

That responsibility is given to you and I who say we love Christ. There's no one who's going to come from heaven to come and evangelize. evangelism is a task for those who say yes to Christ. There's no other option. God has given us that responsibility. And that is coming from a point of love. That's where it flows from.

John 3.16 tells us, for God so loved the world that he gave his own son that whoever believes in him will not perish but have eternal life.

[28 : 52] So, it's coming from a position of love. God loves the world. God loves humanity. It's people that are pulling away from him.

The coming of Christ is God's expression of love to humanity. And it's simple.

say yes to him and you have eternal life. And when we go out to reach out people for Christ, we are also coming from that position of understanding that it is what makes God happy.

And it should also be in us build that understanding of knowing what happens as well if there's no relationship between a human being and God.

We are wishing them well when we are reaching people out with the love of Christ. Christ. It is not that we are going there with a message that brings distress to them.

[30 : 17] No, it is a message that brings life to them. For God so loved the world that he gave his only the golden son will not perish but will have eternal life.

So we are there to participate alongside God. As I said, we reach out, we share what the gospel is. And I'm assuming that because you are a Christian, you have an understanding of why you are a Christian and what makes you a Christian.

Some people say, what can I say? That understanding that you have from scripture of what makes you a Christian and who you are as a Christian, that's the knowledge that you also pass on to the next person.

If the knowledge needs to be corrected a little bit, we've got the elders, they will correct it in the teachings. we all have got a responsibility.

I've heard stories of people that have come to Christ because a grandfather or grandmother has shared Christ with them. So, it's not limited at a particular age.

[31 : 46] I've also heard stories of people that have come to Christ because a Sunday school, someone who goes to Sunday school invited them when they were out to come to Sunday school and that was them.

That's how they encountered the Lord. And I say for some, if you find that words are difficult, it was simply asking or getting people to get in touch with where they can hear the words.

And those who are the gurus like our minister of the theology will then expound the scriptures. But Christ has no option for doing nothing when it comes to this.

It is the responsibility of each and every person who says they love Christ. And I'm saying the text gives us the what but the text does not give us the how.

But I know sometimes we find preachers that get fired up by one strategy. It's okay. Some will want to have the Billy Graham kind of evangelistic concepts.

[33 : 15] as long as people come to Christ may the Lord be praised. Some will say my strategy is friendship evangelism.

Can you find ways that work for you to do what you have been commissioned to do? It is the great commission.

commission. This commission is not given to non-believers. No. This commission is not given to some super human being that will come and help people change.

No. This commission is given to each and every human being who says in their hearts of hearts I love Jesus.

There is a Christian theologian who wrote a book What Has Happened to Europe?

[34 : 30] Basically in his book he is looking at how Europe in the last 50 years has changed from being basically a continent that was known as the hub of Christianity to becoming a continent that in history has had the highest or the quickest decline rates in people coming to know the Lord.

What has happened? Some people say after the First World War because the church didn't speak out against the war or stand against the war some people felt disillusioned because the church did not stand up against what was happening so people started getting out of the churches and he says the other reason has been the privatization of the Christian faith that people or believers started looking at Christianity as their own thing it's a private matter and he was saying because of that understanding if someone begins to say this is a private issue and they are beginning to create a world of their own separated from the church then there are elements how can we support each other the elements that we begin to miss we learn in scripture that we must always come together when we come together we support each other we encourage each other and we continue going forward together if it becomes a privatized faith that's for me why sometimes

I kind of felt the epidemic brought another problem to the church because people got so used to zoom services because it's comfortably at home but also it's also easy to switch off if you're home scripture tells us we must always come together coming together we'll be able to learn more we learn from each other we'll be able to do things together encourage one another and above all also correction discipline if you are on your own you've got a privatized form of faith if something happens who's going to discipline you no one it's all part of being disciples of Christ because our lifestyle also is a form of evangelism the way we live the way we conduct ourselves but getting back to the main point evangelism is your responsibility evangelism is my responsibility when we pray for revival that understanding must be the break of our mind that we also need to reach out to the gospel shall we pray

Lord once again we do come before you we know and acknowledge that we have heard it many times and at times we have often passed the back on to others believing that it's other people's responsibility to reach out but you tell us in your words that if we love you it's part of who we are in you to reach out with your message to those who do not know you we pray

Lord for courage and we do also pray for opportunities we do pray that we may find ways of doing it that we're comfortable with but if we cannot think of any ways that we're comfortable with we pray that we may move out of our comfort zone to do that which is at the heart of what you want us to do we do continue to pray for wisdom we know that it's not always easy but we pray that you may give us that courage and the wisdom that we need to share that is dear to us and that which is also dear to you we we acknowledge that sometimes we share away from this responsibility sometimes we feel as human beings that it's not cool enough sometimes as human beings we feel we might be viewed by those around us as imposing but we pray that you may give us the right opportunities to reach out we are living in a world where we can see the effects of people turning away from you we see an increase in divorces we see an increase in people not knowing who they are a lack of proper identity for we know that as human beings if we are not grounded in you if we are not grounded in your teaching then we will lose a sense of understanding of what being human is all about we have our being in you you created us we pray

[42 : 30] Lord that we may find it in our hearts to to speak to members of our families who do not know you about you to speak to colleagues at work and to strangers that we come across if the opportunities arise we pray and ask all these things in the name of the one who loves us more than another our Lord Jesus Christ who died for a sake that we may have life and have it in abundance in his name we pray amen