

The Great Commission (2)

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- [0 : 0 0] A hundred years ago, the houses around our church building here were occupied by Lowlanders, Highlanders, and Irish.
- Fifty years ago, the first Asians and Afro-Caribbeans arrived. Twenty-five years ago, Eastern Europeans began to come, and soon after, Southeast Asian students.
- Thornwood now contains between 50 and 100 nationalities. The nations have come to Glasgow. The peoples once so far away are now so very near.
- Well, as Christians, what's to be our response to this new reality? Some see it as a threat, but if we're taking the Great Commission of Matthew 28 seriously, it is a God-given opportunity to make disciples for Jesus Christ.
- Jesus said, Go and make disciples of all nations. The nations are here among us. It no longer takes three months on a dangerous sea voyage to reach them.
- [1 : 0 9] It takes 30 seconds and no further than five meters to get to the door of this church, and representatives of most of the peoples of the world will pass by.
- Some will look just like us. Others wear strange clothes, and their skin's a different color from ours. Others speak languages we don't understand and come from communities we've never heard of.
- But it's to these people Jesus calls us to go. Can you hear His voice as you leave this building this morning? Can you hear the voice of Jesus as you stand outside on Crow Road and watch all these people walking up and down with no more thought of Jesus than what they had for dinner this time last year?
- Last week, we began our studies into the Great Commission by asking the following two questions. For whom is the Great Commission?
- And upon what is the Great Commission based? Today, I want to conclude by asking two further questions from Matthew 28, 19 through 20.
- [2 : 1 9] What is the Great Commission? And what is our promise for the Great Commission? Look out over the world, yes, even look out on Crow Road, and hear the voice of Jesus saying to you, Go and make disciples of these people for me.
- First of all then, what is the Great Commission? What is the Great Commission? In English, in verse 19, we have four verbs, but in the original language, only one of them is a true verb.
- The others are what are called participles, which explain what is meant by the main verb. The main verb in the Great Commission is make disciples.
- The three other doing words, the participles, explain what it means and how we're to go about making disciples. By going, teaching, and baptizing.
- To make disciples means we must go, we must baptize, and we must teach. Our aim is to make disciples for Jesus, and we do it by going, baptizing, and teaching.
- [3 : 3 5] Now, disciple comes from a Latin word which means student. To be a disciple is to be a student of Jesus. In the world of Jesus' day, there were no lecture theaters.

Students followed their masters, learning from what their masters said and did. And this continued until a master deemed his student knowledgeable enough to leave him, and as a new master, gather his own group of disciples.

The aim of the Great Commission is to make disciples for our master Jesus. We're his students. We follow him, learning from him what he says and what he does.

The difference is that when his graduation was the aim of the world in Jesus' day, as disciples of Jesus, we never graduate. We grow closer to him and become more like him.

We learn to say what he says and do what he does. The aim of the Great Commission is to make real disciples for Jesus, however few or many that may be.

[4 : 43] Our role is to go to the nations and invite and command them to follow Jesus as their master, and by faith in him, become his lifelong students. And we, having followed Jesus for this long, many of us, can say that we could never have found a wiser and more loving master than Jesus himself.

For however long we've been committed to him, he has kept us close to himself far longer. So glorious, so loving, so wise, our master Jesus is the greatest King and the greatest Lord.

Well, how do we then engage in this Great Commission of making disciples of all nations? We go by, we do it by going, we do it by baptizing, and we do it by teaching.

Even as the church prayerfully engages in these activities, we shall enjoy Christ's presence with us and his blessing upon us, as we'll see later. First, we go, we go.

You'll notice that the Great Commission was delivered by Jesus on top of a mountain in Galilee. Now, most of the disciples of Jesus were from Galilee, with at least four of them being fishermen in Capernaum.

[6 : 02] From the top of this mountain, perhaps Jesus and the eleven disciples could see the village of Capernaum and the Sea of Galilee where those four men worked as fishermen.

Perhaps Peter and Andrew, James and John, could even make out in the distance the outline of their houses. So, laid out beneath them was the safety of home and family and work.

But from this mountain, looking out over their homes, Jesus commands them, go. To make disciples of all nations, they're going to have to leave their homes behind them.

And then their day is very far away. John's going to go to modern-day Turkey. Peter to Rome. Andrew to modern-day Georgia. And Bartholomew is going to go to modern-day Armenia.

To make disciples of all nations means they cannot stay. They must go. What does going for us today mean? It's easy to see how it works for Christians who have become missionaries in different lands.

[7 : 09] They leave home behind them and devote their lives to making disciples for Jesus far away. Scottish missionaries left these shores of the 19th century to make disciples for Jesus in Kenya.

They took their pine coffins with them on the journey because they knew that they would never return to Scotland. And they didn't. None of them did. All of them died there.

They took Jesus' words seriously. Go. But what does go mean for those of us who have not left our homes and become missionaries abroad? It means that Christians are missionaries wherever we are.

We prioritize making disciples for Jesus above our own comforts and our own pleasures. Last week we thought of how Isaiah heard God saying, Who will go for us and whom will we send?

And Isaiah promptly answered, Here am I, send me. To go as a missionary means to hear the voice of God saying, Who will go for me into the office where I work?

[8 : 18] And who will I send there? Only for you to answer, Here am I. Send me to the office in which I work, and I'll make disciples for you.

It is to hear the voice of God saying, Who will go for us into the home in which I live? And who will I send there? Only for you to answer, Here I am.

Send me into the home in which I live, and I'll make disciples for you. It's to hear the voice of God saying, Who will go into the university in which I study?

And who will I send there? Only for you to answer, Here am I. Send me to the university in which I study, and I'll make disciples for you there.

To go for Christ means to place His mission of making disciples for Him above our personal rights, our comfort, and our pleasures. But then someone will object, of course, I don't feel comfortable in sharing the gospel with a non-Christian.

[9 : 23] I just don't feel comfortable in doing that. I sympathize with you. But you've got to get over your discomfort. Jesus says, God's placed us into our offices, our homes, and our universities to make disciples for Jesus.

That's what it means to go. It's about priorities. What comes first, our comforts or Jesus' commission? Second, baptize, baptize.

Now, baptism in the New Testament serves many functions. For John the Baptist, it was about repentance. But in the Great Commission, baptism represents membership of the covenant community of God, the church.

In Jesus' mind, a solitary Christian who doesn't do church is a contradiction in terms. Christians belong together in the community of church.

If we want to make disciples for Jesus, we need to incorporate them into the church. Someone is not a disciple of Jesus if they are not in a church.

[10 : 40] The church father, Cyprian, later quoted by John Calvin, said, If we have God as our father, we have the church as our mother.

It is the aim of the Great Commission to add members to the church, not converts to a list. Again, John Calvin says, Beyond the pale of the church, there is no forgiveness of sin and no salvation can be hoped for.

Those who believe in Christ through us may not become members of our congregation, but it's our aim that they become members of our congregation. Jesus' command is to make disciples, and the only discipleship He knows is that which results in baptism into the life of the church.

Because the church is the school of Christian discipleship. It is in and through the church we learn to live as Christian believers. The church with all its rough edges is the church in which Christ sanctifies us and helps us to grow as Christians.

A running friend of mine knew someone who in their younger years was a victim of sexual abuse by a priest. This is the worst kind of abuse to which a child can be subjected, of course.

[12 : 03] Yet he, after many years of hating the church, has now returned to membership. When my friend asked him why he had returned to the church, he replied, The church that hurts is also the church that heals.

The church that hurts is also the church that heals. None of us, I guess, have been hurt by the church as severely as that man was. Yes, we've been hurt, and yes, I've been hurt, but let's remember the wisdom that man showed when he said, The church that hurts is also the church that heals.

We are called to grow churches by baptizing new members and introducing them into the school of Christian discipleship. We're to have no track with churchless Christianity, just as we are to have no track with Christless churches.

Furthermore, in the context of the Great Commission with its emphasis on making disciples of all nations, we are to grow churches made up of many nationalities and many peoples. A healthy church isn't made up of one demographic, one ethnic class, or one economic class.

We should not aim to have churches for Africans, or churches for students, or churches for Highlanders, but churches made up of all kinds of people bound together by their common faith in Jesus Christ.

[13 : 26] If the church is such a big deal in Jesus' mind, it's such that He views it as a pillar of discipleship. Why is it so little a deal for so many of us?

Baptize calls us to look carefully at our priorities. But then thirdly, teach. Jesus says, teaching them to observe all that I've commanded you.

If we want to obey Jesus and to be disciples of Christ, to make other disciples for Christ, we need to be teachers of all Christ has commanded. We need to understand for ourselves the good news, that it's by faith alone, in Christ alone, through grace alone, a person becomes a disciple of Jesus.

It's through faith in a crucified and risen Christ who gave Himself to deliver us from all our sins and give us eternal life. Now, teaching requires words, and therefore, it's necessary that if we are to engage in the Great Commission, we speak the word of the gospel, we verbalize our faith in Jesus Christ, and invite others to enjoy faith in Him also.

our words may not be smooth, confident, cultured, educated even, but even as we speak the word of God to non-Christians, as we'll see in our last point, it's really Christ who is speaking through us.

[14 : 53] Nevertheless, it is beholden upon us that if we are to teach the word of the gospel, we are to be prepared. Are we prepared to give a reason for the hope that is within us?

Have we given any thought to what we would say if someone asked us, why are you a Christian? Having a minister has many advantages, but one of its big disadvantages is that we think He'll do all the evangelism for us, so that we don't have to do anything ourselves.

Rome in every count, the call of the Great Commission is addressed to every single believer in Christ, teaching them to observe all that I've commanded you. You'll notice carefully from verse 20 that Jesus does not say teaching them all I have commanded you, rather teaching them to observe all that I've commanded you.

Don't just teach them the gospel, teach them how to keep the gospel. And the way we do that is not just with our words, but with our examples. We show them how the gospel works in our lives.

The work of making disciples is not merely tell, it is show and tell, for the show is the grace and holiness of our sanctified, albeit imperfect, lives.

[16 : 12] We show them how our faith in Christ makes a difference to us, and then we tell them about what faith in Jesus Christ really is. You know, I've observed through the years that often the best evangelists are those who have suffered the most, because they can draw on a lifetime of God's grace, helping them deal with pain as they share the good news of Jesus with others.

They're not perfect people sharing the good news with imperfect people, but they are suffering people sharing Christ's grace with other suffering people.

Show and tell is the key to teaching people how to obey all that Jesus has commanded us. You know, I've made what Jesus says here sound so complicated, but at the basics, this.

Be intentional about living as a church-based Christian. Take the opportunities God gives you to share the good news with others, whoever they are, but especially those closest to you.

As my friend David Meredith says, it's not rocket science. Be intentional about living as a church-based Christian wherever God has placed you. This is obedience to the Great Commission of Jesus.

[17 : 35] Well, secondly, and more briefly, what is our promise for the Great Commission? What's our promise for the Great Commission? Fulfilling the Great Commission may sound simple, but it's very far from easy.

The Great Commission will cost us much, but it won't cost us as much as it cost Jesus, because He gave His life for us. The Great Commission may not be rocket science, but to engage with it requires the power only rocket engines can give us.

Jesus says, without me, you can do nothing. So, attached, therefore, to the command of Jesus to go and make disciples for Him is His promise, and behold, I am with you always to the end of the age.

Our promise is Jesus Himself. For as long as it takes us to complete the Great Commission He has set His church, He will be with us.

We do not go alone, for Jesus our Lord is with us always. Now, this is a promise with two aspects. First, the power of Christ, and then the presence of Christ.

[18 : 42] First of all, it's a promise of the power of Christ, the power of Christ. The Christ who promises to be with His church always, is the Christ to whom all authority in heaven and on earth has been given.

The Christ who is with His church as they make disciples for Him is the King of kings and the Lord of lords, and there is no greater power than His, and He promises that He shall be with us as we go.

So, the church goes forward with the gospel to some of the hardest countries in the world, Somalia, North Korea, Eritrea.

It faces the wrath of governments hell-bent on its destruction. The church goes with the gospel into some of the most hostile areas of our society, the LGBT community, the new atheists, the secular media, the drug scene.

It is opposed by every worldly philosophy. What chance do we give the church in these countries and in these areas of our society? If we look merely from a human perspective, we give it no chance at all.

[19 : 51] What's the point, then, of going if we're opposed by such powerful enemies? But, if we are taking the promise of Jesus here in Matthew 28, 20, seriously, we shall not fear our enemies, for greater is He who is with us than those who are against us.

The church shall go in the power of Christ and make disciples in these hostile countries and in these no-go areas of our society. What about us as individual Christians?

We go to people whose hearts are hardened by sin to the extent that they do not want to nor are they able to respond to the good news of Jesus Christ. Our words are like drops of water in the glare of the burning sun, evaporating as quickly as we can sprinkle them.

We are weak and stumbling at what we say, fearful and often ashamed of the gospel. Remember, the promise of the power of Christ is always with us.

He's with us in our homes and our offices, our classrooms and our leisure centers. He promises to strengthen us so that the stumbling words we speak are no longer our words, they are His words.

[21 : 06] They become like bullets penetrating paper, armor, and passing deep into hearts and minds. The powerful Christ opens hearts Satan and sin have shut.

we become conductors of His power. The heavenly Christ working powerfully through us to make disciples for Himself.

Not all to whom we speak will believe, but some will. Some will because the power of Christ is in us and is working through us. The thing is, though, Christ only promises us His power as we go with the gospel and make disciples.

Never is the church more powerful than when it's on mission, nor does Christ work more powerfully through the Christian than when she in dependence about Him is sharing the gospel.

Do you want to experience the power of Christ working through you? Then resolve to make disciples for Him. The power of Christ.

[22 : 11] But then secondly, finally, the presence of Christ. The presence of Christ. Of course, the most obvious meaning of Christ's promise is that He'll be with us as we go and make disciples for Him.

In the days of Joshua, God promised to be with His people as they crossed the Jordan, facing many enemies on their journey into the promised land. And Christ promises to be with His church as we go into enemy territory with the gospel.

We're going to face opposition. We're going to become downcast and disillusioned at the lack of response. But the Lord Himself will cheer our hearts with a fresh vision of His grace and glory.

We'll be tempted to give up. But the Christ who promised to be with us will give us new strength for the fight. And when our hope wavers, He'll renew us with His hope.

He'll be with us always, 24 hours of the day, seven days a week, 52 weeks a year. He'll never leave us. Not even if we fail Him.

[23 : 17] As long as our hearts are set on mission, even if we make the most outrageous mistakes, He will never leave our side. We might go out fearfully and much weakness, but didn't the Apostle Paul say the same thing about himself when he arrived in Corinth?

Christ was with him. A church was planted in Corinth. We may face opposition, but the growing friendship we have with Christ will more than compensate.

But again, you'll notice, Christ only promises us this experience of His presence as we go with His gospel and make disciples of all nations.

A church on mission experiences Jesus' presence with it, but a missionless church is a Christless church. Do you want to experience Christ's presence with you?

Resolve to make disciples for Him. The nations are on our doorstep, literally. Our Lord has all authority in heaven and on earth.

[24 : 25] The Great Commission is for all of us. The message we proclaim is the greatest message our listeners will ever hear. Christ attaches great promises upon our obedience.

What then is stopping us? William Carey is known as the father of modern mission. He was a missionary to India in the late 18th and early 19th centuries.

Carey famously said these words, expect great things from God. Attempt great things for God.

Expect great things from God. Attempt great things for God. Let those inspiring words ring in our ears as together we resolve to go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to observe all that Jesus has commanded us.