

The Great Commission

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[0:00] Please turn with me once again to the New Testament reading which we had earlier on, Matthew 28 and verse 16. Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them.

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

Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you.

And behold, I am with you always to the end of the age. The older I get, the harder it is for me to travel great distances.

So when I tell you, as most of you know already, that the week before last I was in Brazil, it sounds very glamorous, but I can assure you there was very little glamour to it whatsoever.

[1:20] For one thing, it involves sitting on a plane for twelve hours in a very tightly confined space. And then I saw next to nothing of the country itself.

We were whisked from the airport to a hotel where we were not allowed out of. You just, in these kind of places, you simply can't go for a walk the way you can walk onto Col Beach or down to Point or whatever.

You simply can't do that in these places because you don't know what area you're in. So you have to stay where you're told. And it was a confined space.

It was a very pleasant location. And we were looked after very well. But we saw absolutely next to nothing of the place. It was five days in one place altogether where I attended a conference.

It was even cold. One of the many benefits that there are in attending conferences like this is the privilege.

[2:26] And this is where, it's certainly not glamorous, but it's a massive privilege. To meet church leaders from different parts of the world.

Not just from places like Europe and the USA, but from poorer and developing countries. Indeed, places where there is war and where there is unrest.

I met one church leader from Ukraine and had a long conversation with him about the situation over there. And how Christians and how the church were coping with a very tense situation.

An uncertain political future in that part of the world. And of course for them, this is their opportunity to get away from these troubles.

And to spend a week in fellowship with other Christians who can pray together for them. And I can come away more intelligent. And know more about that situation.

[3:23] And be more aware of it. And I can also share it with you as our congregation. I learn a huge amount.

And I very often come away from these events deeply humbled. Humbled, first of all, by the fact that we're only a small, tiny part of a worldwide movement.

In which God is reaching people and changing people's lives. And a week like this is an opportunity to just get a glimpse into what God is doing in various parts of the world.

And I'm also reminded and I'm humbled by the fact that the church is comprised worldwide by a variety of different cultures. And different kinds of people.

And we are not always right. But just because we happen to follow one theological tradition. That doesn't make us right in everything that we do and everything that we think. And it's an immensely important lesson to go and to discuss and to fellowship with people whose hearts God has changed for the gospel.

[4 : 37] And who've been born again. And who are at work in the cause of Christ. And they leave me very often with a feeling that they are so much more enthusiastic about the work of the gospel than I am.

And very often I come back humbled by having met with people who I regard as being so spiritually superior to myself.

They have a greater desire to learn. And they have a greater desire to reach people. And their sense of the reality of the gospel seems to be so much more alive than mine.

Perhaps the fact that we are so accustomed to the gospel. We've grown up with it. It has caused us to be complacent.

And it's meant that we've lost sight of the wonder of what Jesus has done in his death on the cross. There are people in the world who haven't lost sight of that.

[5 : 41] And they're going out into the world and they're fearless. They're fearless. And they're prepared to tell people about the gospel in all kinds of different circumstances.

Come what may. And they're prepared to make known their faith in the Lord. Do you know how many Christians there are in South America? There are millions of Christians in South America.

We think of South America as a mission field. People say to me very often, oh, where are your family? I say, I have a daughter living in Lima, Peru. Almost always people say to me, oh, is she a missionary?

And the assumption is that South America is a mission field. Well, I suppose it is. And every place is a mission field. But in actual fact, there are more Christians per head of population in South America than there are in Europe.

We are the mission field. We are the ones who are ignorant of the Bible. We are the ones who need to be reached. We are the ones who are resistant to the gospel. I was waiting at the airport in Sao Paulo a week ago.

[6 : 44] I was waiting for hours and hours and hours to be picked up. I was getting really frustrated. But never mind. You have to just sit there and just wait. And this group of soldiers came along. I can only guess that they'd been drafted in to help with security at the World Cup.

I don't know. But they were in uniform. There must have been about eight or nine of them. And they sat in the same row as I was sitting in by myself. And there was a whole row of them sitting there talking to one another.

One of them reached into his rucksack. And he pulled out a Bible. And started reading his Bible. In front of all his mates.

And his mates obviously thought nothing of it. They obviously were quite accustomed to it. And I was thinking, how often do you ever, ever see that kind of thing happening in Europe?

Europe. Reformed Europe. Europe that follows the tradition of Calvin and Knox and Luther. With such a rich theological heritage.

[7 : 45] And yet our witness to the gospel is so poor. And yet there are places in the world where people, men and women, are prepared to bear witness to Jesus so openly. And so naturally.

I was astonished. Of all kinds of people, a soldier. Probably hardened and ready for trouble and riots and violence and all the rest.

And yet he's sitting there reading his Bible. What a rebuke it was to me. Was I reading my Bible? Would I think of taking out my Bible and reading it?

I don't know. It's a real rebuke. And the other thing that humbles me about meeting people. Is the fact that I get to meet people who are persecuted.

Or who know people who are persecuted for their faith. I met people from Egypt. From Iran. I met one man who had family in Syria. Who was able to tell me some of what was going on there.

[8 : 46] And the incredible persecution that there is of Christians in Syria. It was horrific. Rampant persecution of Christians.

The most obscene events taking place. Against God's people. Our brothers and sisters. Your brothers. My brothers. In the Lord. These are things that we very rarely have ever heard about.

On the media. And it leaves me with the impression, of course. It always leaves me humbled. Knowing that. And it always has the same effect on me.

I come back thinking, well, our wee squabbles. In our church circles. Are nothing. In comparison to what other people have to suffer. For their faith.

I want to tell you something. If you are a. Particularly if you're a young person this evening. The one piece of advice I always give to young Christians is this. At some point soon.

[9 : 50] Go out into the world. And meet other Christians from other cultures. And get to know them. Even for a short time.

Just to see what God is doing in other parts of the world. Now you're saying, well, what's this going to do with them? It has everything to do with it. Because there is a worldwide dimension to this chapter.

Matthew 28. Jesus said, go into all the world. They were not to stay in Jerusalem. They were not to confine the gospel to Judea. They were to take an interest in what God was doing.

And if they weren't able to go there themselves. They were to make sure they knew what God was doing in other parts of the world. And all through the Acts of the Apostles. There's this global dimension, isn't there?

Even with the pathetic communication that they had. Letters taking months to get from one place to another. And yet they knew. They kept in touch with each other. So that they would always make sure they prayed for one another.

[10 : 50] And so that the problems in Corinth became the problems in Ephesus. And they became the problems in Rome. And they became the problems in Palestine. And so that all of God's people would know the sufferings.

And the triumphs. And the successes. And the joys. And the sorrows that every other Christian was going through. So that they would all be part of this together.

God's church is global. And in a day and age when travel is so relatively easy. There should be no excuse for us to take a global interest in what God is doing in the world.

It is simply not good enough to confine our interests to our own time and space. And to confine our interests to our own comfort zone.

So what I would say to you. Especially if you're a younger person. And if you've got the means to do it. And if you're able to do it at all. Make your mind up to go. If you're a young Christian.

[11:51] Go to some other part. But particularly. Some place in what they call the global south. Do you know what the global south is? Or rather the global majority. Do you know what the global majority is?

It's South America. Africa. India. China. The southern hemisphere. Where there are an enormous number of God's people. And where the church is growing. I didn't say there were no problems.

There are massive problems. The church is growing at an uncontrollable rate. Where often people are coming to faith. Or coming to make a profession of faith.

But there's nothing to back it up. There's nothing to follow up that profession. And so. Very often people fall into the wrong hands. We start following the wrong voices. Listening to the wrong messages.

And not being nurtured enough. And so that. Events like the one I attended. A couple of weeks ago. Is enormously. Are enormously important.

[12:50] Because we were. We were discussing. What the future. Of making sure. That people were educated. In the Bible. People who are being converted.

So tonight. I want us to. Just. For the next 15 minutes or so. Just to remind ourselves. Of what the church is all about. You've heard this passage before. You've heard.

I'm sure. I'm sure. Umpteen past. Sermons on a passage like this. Umpteen reminders. Of what we're doing here. And what the Lord wants us to do. As a church. And yet. I don't believe.

We should ever tire. Of hearing it. We should always. Be prepared. To remind ourselves. That we are here. Because of the gospel. Because God.

In his mercy. Has reached down. In the person of Jesus Christ. And has rescued us from sin. But then. We are here. For the gospel. Because it is through. Human means.

[13:45] That God. Intends. To reach others. With the gospel. So that they. So that they. Like you. May hear the gospel. And so that they. May come to faith. In Jesus Christ.

And by the power. Of the Holy Spirit. That is the way. That God works. He could have done it. Some other way. He chose not to. He could have. Announced from heaven.

Himself. He could have sent. Angels into the world. He could have worked. Miracles all over the world. But he chose. To transmit. The message of the gospel. By means.

Of men. And women. Like you. And I. In our ordinary. Circumstances. Being the light. Of the world. What Jesus. Says to his disciples. Here in Matthew 28.

He says to all. Of his disciples. Not just to the apostles. They were to kick things off. They were to get things. Started in Jerusalem. And yet. The fire was to spread. From Jerusalem.

[14:40] And that was to. It was to. Spread. Into all the regions. Round about. And into Asia. And into the Roman Empire. The rest of the Roman Empire. And all across.

The world. From then on. I want us to think about. Very. Very. Briefly. Because. I don't want us. Just to focus on the command. Itself. What you find.

Is three things. In this passage. You find. That there's the commission itself. What you call. The great commission. Go into all the world. And make disciples. Of all nations. That's the great commission.

It's the command. That Jesus gave his disciples. That from then on. They must be about. The business. Of making disciples. Of. All. Nations. Nations. But the command.

Had a basis. And it's quite wrong. Of us. To just jump to the command. Without thinking. First of all. First of all. Very quickly. About the basis. Of the command. You find the basis. In verse 18.

[15:37] Jesus came. And said to them. All. Here's the basis. All authority. In heaven. And on earth. Has been given to me. That's the basis. Of the command. All authority. In other words.

He didn't just jump to the command. He said this first. And he doesn't say anything. Without a reason. Here's what he says. In the. Here's the prologue. All authority. In heaven. And on earth. Has been given to me.

Then he said. Therefore. Because. All authority. Has been given to me. Therefore. Go and make disciples. Of all nations. Baptizing them. In the name of the Father. And of the Son. And of the Holy Spirit.

And the last element. To the great commission. The third element. Is the promise. Of his presence. Regardless. Of. Whatever happens. I. Am with you.

Always. To the end. Of the age. Three things then. Very quickly. First of all. The basis is found in verse 18. All authority. In heaven and on earth.

[16:30] Has been given to me. Authority. The basis is the authority. Of Jesus Christ. Now. There's a natural question.

That's bound to arise. Whenever we. Think about. The statement. And the natural question. Is this. Well. If Jesus was God. If he is God. Then.

In what sense. Has all authority. Been given to him. Surely. As God. He possesses. Ultimate. Final. Authority.

In the first place. Was there ever a moment. When. God. Didn't have the authority. How come God. Needs to have authority. Given to him. Who's going to give it to him.

Who has greater authority. Than he has. After all. When you think of the question. What is authority. Authority. Is the right. To command. Obedience.

[17:24] God. Has the right. To command. Obedience. From nothing. Into something. Genesis 1. Let there be light. And there was light. God commanded. Let the vegetation.

Spring forth. And the vegetation. Sprung forth. God commanded. The planets. And the sun. And the moon. And the stars. Into existence. And it was so. The animals. The fish. The birds. And it was so.

Now that's authority. Ultimate. Final. Authority. Authority. Is God's. In other words. He commands. And it happens. That's authority. Authority. Now if Jesus.

Is God. And Jesus. Was there. At the first place. And Jesus. Was part. Of the creation. Process. Which the apostle. Paul tells us. He was. Then in what sense.

Does any authority. Have to be given. To him. It's worth stopping. And just thinking. Just for a few moments.

[18:19] See if we can. Unpack this. In some meaningful way. The issue here. Is not creation. The issue. Is not the parting.

Of the Red Sea. Raining fire. On Sodom. It's not the flood. It's not some kind. Of physical. Or scientific. Event. The issue here. Is. Our salvation.

That's what the gospel. Is all about. And that's why. Jesus came into the world. When he says. All authority. Has been given to me. What he means. Is that. The authority.

Has been given. To me. To save. People. From their sins. To change their hearts. To make them. Into a new creation. Well.

You might. You might ask. Well. Surely God. Had that authority. In the first place. Yes. And no. God.

[19:16] God cannot. Forgive sin. Unless. Sin is paid for. God. God. Because. If God. Was going to. Forgive sin.

Without. It being. Paid for. God. Would be. A contradiction. To himself. God. Says. The wages. Of sin. Is death. God.

Says. The soul. That sins. Shall die. God. And so. Unless. There is. Death. As the payment.

Of sin. There can. Not. Be. Forgiveness. Even. Where God. To say so. God. Cannot. Contradict. Himself.

He. Can't. Go. Against. Himself. God. Is. The one. Who. Has said. The wages. Of sin. Is death. He. Cannot. Then. Turn. Round. And. Say. Your sins. Are forgiven. Without.

[20:09] The penalty. Being. Paid. But. Jesus. Came. Into. The world. In. Order. To. Pay. The penalty. For sin. And so.

Having. Paid. It. Having. Died. And. Risen. Again. And. Having. Now. Stood. In front. Of his. Disciples. He. Was. Able. To. Say. All. Authority. Not.

Just. Creative. Authority. Not. Just. The. Authority. To. Command. The. Universe. Into. Being. But. The. Authority. To. Say. To. Someone. Your. Sins. And.

Your. Iniquities. Are. For. For. Given. Because. I. Have. Paid. For. Them. In. My. Death. On. The. Cross. That's.

Being. Given. To. Him. Because. He. Was. The. Lamb. Of. God. That. Was. Put. To. Death. As. The. Perfect. Ultimate. Once. For. All. Sacrifice. For. Our. Sins.

[21:05] Which. Means. That. When. We. Share. The. Gospel. With. Someone. We. Have. Every. Right. To. Say. To. That. Person. If. You. Repent. And. Believe. In. The. Lord. Jesus. Christ. Your.

Sins. Not. Just. Might. Be. Forgiven. You. Can. You. Don't. Say. There's. A. Chance. That. Your. Sins. Might. Be. Forgiven. You. Can. Say. To. That. Person. Your. Sins. Will. Be. Forgiven. We.

Say. That. With.

A. Complete. Change. Of. Life. Newness. Of. Life. Eternal. Life. To. All. Those. Who. trust and believe in Jesus and his death and his resurrection so that was to give them the confidence to go the complete confidence to go out into the world as indeed they had done before in Matthew chapter 10 they went through cities and villages proclaiming Jesus and sharing him with the people that they met but then the commission itself as you can break it up into several constituents parts in verse 19 go therefore they were to move they were to be on the move and they were to reach people they were to first of all to stay in Jerusalem and until the Holy Spirit came upon them on the day of Pentecost and empowered them to go out with the gospel and then their personal circumstances meant that many of them were to go away and to go into different parts like like time a I'm thinking of a town up north of of Jerusalem and I just can't remember various parts of the region round about and they were to proclaim Jesus and often it was under persecution that this took place and then the apostle Paul and other other disciples went over to

Asia Minor and they reached to Cyprus and to and to places like Corinth and Philippi and and Rome itself with the gospel they were to go and to make disciples of all nations and they were to baptize them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit and this is of course what happened like the the Ethiopian eunuch when when somebody came to faith in Jesus the first thing that happens by way of profession of faith was that they were initiated into the church and into the name of the Lord Jesus Christ by that by way of that outward sign in which the death of Jesus was applied to them and in which they came and they were initiated into the church but they were also to teach them to teach them everything to obey everything I have commanded you to teach them how to live the Christian life to teach them the knowledge of what God had done in the Bible another statistic another benefit of going to a conference like the one I attended two weeks ago is that like so many conferences you get statistics and you can get so bamboozled by statistics that you're you're left quite confused but one that stuck with me was this did you know that every day I couldn't believe this they tell me it's true every day 50,000 people are converted who have absolutely no knowledge of the Bible can you believe that every single day somewhere in the world 50,000 people collectively are converted and they don't now I didn't say they had no knowledge of the gospel you can't be converted without knowledge of the gospel because they heard the gospel they hear the gospel they they they are they are made aware of their own need and their lostness and they're made aware the Holy Spirit moves within that person and they come to faith in the

[25 : 07] Lord Jesus Christ but apart from that they don't know anything about Abraham Isaac Jacob Moses Isaiah Lot Joseph Daniel you name it and somebody said two weeks ago they said this that the number one need in the worldwide church today is biblical literacy for people to just get to know the Bible and again it left me with a feeling of utter shame here am I I've known from that size what the ten commandments are learned by catechism been taught or by my mother and Sunday school growing up within the church and we're talking about the kind of knowledge that our kids would have and there are people in the world being converted don't have that and I'm left thinking what am I doing with all of this the Lord is going to hold us to account one day with what for what we are doing with the knowledge that we have had the privileges the massive privileges that we have had in being brought into a Bible believing church in which we hear the gospel and the

Bible being explained to us week after week what are we to do with it we are to make sure first of all we are living close to the Lord secondly that we're living the kind of lives that are Christ like thirdly that we are witnesses to him now we are to make sure that we are letting our light so shine before other people that they may see by the kind of lives that we live and glorify our father who is in heaven and I'm left wondering how come a denomination like ours and I'm not blaming anyone I'm blaming myself how come a denomination like ours is so guilty of holding all this information to ourselves and singularly failing to share that vital knowledge with a world that is so desperately in need do you know there are people in thousands of places tonight where they would flock just to hear somebody explaining a chapter of the Bible with hunger they wouldn't care about time nobody looking at their watches they just want to know more I've seen it for myself when I used to go to Thailand in the refugee camp in Thailand young people would sit there hour after hour after hour and they would just absorb and they were taking notes furiously they just wanted to know more and more and more about the Bible

I believe that God requires from us I'm not saying that every one of us is in the position to go out with the gospel of course we're not God has placed each one of us tonight where we are in our own place but we are to put into practice what we have the heritage the privilege the gospel the knowledge the faith that we have it's to bear fruit in the way that we live our lives in the way that we that we conduct ourselves in this world in the interest that we take in the extent to which we pray how much do you pray for the various nations in the world do you know who how many missionaries do you know how many different churches all over the world do you know I mean I'm not talking about 20 or 30 I'm even talking about one or two or three different churches in various places in the world that you can pray for them how many people do you know who have gone out into various places we have them regularly on a Wednesday night people from Eastern Europe people from Africa people from India sometimes people South America people from Duhusani where there are there are students who are preparing to go into the towns and the villages and to and to to fulfill this great commission are we remembering them in prayer are we asking that the Lord will equip these people these students for to go and to be evangelists and to bring the gospel into wherever God sends them the last element of course is the promise the great promise that Jesus gave to his disciples behold I am with you always to the end of the age Jesus was about to depart from them in a few seconds he was about to be lifted up from them and now he's telling them I am with you always he's going to be with them according to his promise and yet according to what they're seeing he's going to be taken away from them how can these two things possibly be are they not a contradiction?

no they're not because this is God God in the flesh Jesus Christ having come into the world as one of us having taken our nature our human nature to himself is now going to be physically lifted up to heaven to sit at the father's right hand where as our great high priest he makes ever makes intercession for us and yet a few days afterwards he poured out his holy spirit to indwell the church and you can't separate the holy spirit from Jesus and the father these three are one God the same in substance equal in power and in glory so when the holy spirit comes Jesus comes and the father comes in the holy in the holy in the holy spirit Jesus is going to indwell his child for their comfort and their strengthening and their nourishment and their encouragement day by day and their reminder through the bible of what their task was and that ultimate knowledge that whatever they had to face in this world and like I say there are Christians who today are facing poverty they're facing persecution they're facing persecution they're having to deal with the kind of perplexing troubles that you and I would never be able to cope with how are they able to do that?

because God the holy spirit is giving them because God the holy spirit is giving them the power and giving them the wisdom and the patience and the Christ likeness to go through fire and water for the sake of his cause and because they love him so much they are prepared to lay down their lives for him it's no bad thing to be made humble we need it we need to be rebuked by our brothers and sisters near us and far away we need to be reminded of what we are about what the church is for we need to be reminded time and again of what Jesus came to do and what Jesus is doing in this world and praise him he's doing great things many are the adversaries and the foes and the obstacles but greater is he that is in us than he who is in the world let's bow our heads in prayer our father in heaven we give thanks once again this evening that we are part of your kingdom and we pray to play that part to live that part we pray to be mindful of our brothers and sisters in the Lord particularly those who are suffering for the sake of the gospel

[33:21] Lord we thank you for their courage we thank you Lord for their resolve and for their faith and we pray Lord that where that courage is failing that you will give them the strength in extraordinary ways to be able to suffer for the sake of Jesus we ask oh Lord that you will make us mindful of our privileges and show us show us ways in which to put what we have into practice for the sake of Stornoway for the sake of our neighbours our friends those we love those we know those we don't know Lord we pray to be a praying vibrant people full of your Holy Spirit we ask oh Lord that you will fill us and that you will wash us and that you will heal our backslidings and that you will restore us into a right relationship with you in which we are able to see as never before the wonder of what Jesus has done for us and the certainty of the coming day in his name

Amen we're going to sing together in Psalm 68 from verse 18 that's on page 303 we'll sing four verses Psalm 68 verse 18 to verse 20 thou hast oh Lord most glorious ascended up on high and in triumph victorious led captive