

The Great Commission

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Preacher: Mark

[0 : 0 0] Before I joined SGA, I was a pastor of a church, and my people, I enjoyed having missionary organizations with coming to the church, but my people always said to me, you know, had your presentations, inevitably, you know, mission meetings usually go on a little bit longer, but they all said, now, they do know when you finish, don't you?

When they get up to give the sermon, they're not giving a half-hour, 40-minute sermon, are they? So, I said, no, don't worry, I will always make sure that they know that's not a full sermon. So, as I've told many other missionary organizations that you have no need to worry, you're not going to be here for another half-hour listening to me, I'm going to read the Bible, and I'm going to speak for about 10-12 minutes maximum, and then we'll finish and sing, if that's okay. Thank you. So, if you've got your Bibles with you, can you turn, please, to the final few verses of Matthew chapter 28.

Well-known passage, I know, but Matthew chapter 28, and we're going to read those famous verses in verse 16. So, Matthew chapter 28 and verse 16, where we're told, now, the 11 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 of 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.

Amen. And this is the word of the Lord. Can we just bow our heads in prayer and ask for the Lord's blessing as we consider this. Father, we thank you. You know, the potential for making mistakes and giving people the wrong impression never ceases to amaze me. Earlier on, we had some notices. They're a part of most meetings, and there's something that has to be done. But there's always the chance that what is said can be very different to what is intended. So, recently, I came across a couple of examples of genuine notices that were given in some churches. And well, let's just say the impression given was not what was originally intended. So, on one church notice sheet, it was announced that the church's weekly Wednesday night healing meeting was canceled until further notice because the pastor was ill.

In another church notice sheet, it was announced that the evening service tonight, the topic will be what is hell? And then immediately underneath it said, come early and hear our choir practice. And of course, we have to be honest and say there have been times when SGA staff have done the same thing. So, in one of our residential conferences, one unnamed staff member got up, and he's unnamed because I want to keep my job. But he's on there, and he got up, and he was promoting this book. Now, it's a good book. It's about the 60 years of Slavic Gospel Association and how God has used us. But this member of staff decided to promote it in an evening meeting, the first evening meeting of the residential conference. And well, let's just say his method was a bit unusual because he said, we all know how difficult it is to get to sleep when you're in an unfamiliar bed. Well, if you can't get to sleep, you need to get this book. Needless to say, in our own unique way, all the staff went up to John Burney, who was the author, and congratulated him on creating the perfect cure for insomnia. Not exactly the impression that was wanted to be given. But you know, I mention those notices because there are times when we come to God's Word, and the way we approach the passage can mean we give the wrong impression as well.

[3 : 53] I'm sure it's no great surprise to you that here we are in a missionary meeting, and the speaker gets up to speak in Matthew chapter 28. It's not exactly original, is it? However, there are times when we approach these verses, and the way we do that is all wrong. There are times when the speaker does not get the order right or does not concentrate on the right thing, and as a result, they do end up giving the wrong impression. So, for example, there have been times when I have read this, had this passage preached to me, and immediately the speaker brings us to verse 19. Immediately they bring us to the command to go and make disciples, and of course that is important. But I don't think that's where our main emphasis should be. I don't think that's the key to the passage. Instead, I think what we should really concentrate on is verse 18. So yes, in verse 19 we're told to do something, but what is key, and what is of the utmost importance, is who is giving the command. Because you see, if we don't think about that for a moment, and if we don't understand the authority and power that lies behind these verses, then when faced with the enormity of what we're told to do here, we could start to feel frustrated, overwhelmed, and fearful. We may feel ill-equipped and unable to do what is said here. We may think the task is just too big. And if we start to think like that, then what happens is that these verses become relegated to the league of nice ideas. Nice ideas which are good for a missionary meeting, but which are hopelessly optimistic in the cold, harsh reality of the real world.

But you know, all that changes when we stop and think and realize something of the tremendous power and authority that lies behind these words. Yes, there's a danger if we immediately jump to verse 19, but the objective reality of verse 18 changes absolutely everything.

And that's why for the next few moments, all I want to do is look at what these verses tell us about the Lord Jesus Christ. I don't think you need to tell me that we're all called to go and make disciples of all nations, including your own.

That's an obvious point, and I'm sure you've been told that many different times in many different ways. But instead, all I want to do is remind you again, as I'm sure you've been told, of what we find here of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Because I hope that will encourage us. I hope it will encourage us as we seek to make disciples in other nations, and I hope it will encourage us as we seek to make disciples within our own nations as well.

[6 : 14] So then what is it that we're told about Jesus, which is so important? Well, look please at verse 18, and there we find that Jesus came and said, All authority in heaven and earth has been given to me.

Those are incredible words, aren't they? All authority in heaven and earth has been given to Jesus. But of course, if you would have read the earlier chapters of Matthew, this would have been something that you would already have understood.

Because Matthew has already told us some remarkable things about Jesus. So he's told us he's the authority to heal all diseases, all ailments, and all illnesses. Time and time again, people come to Jesus to be healed, and time and time again, Jesus heals them.

Because there is no illness or disease that Jesus cannot deal with. Then we're also told that Jesus has the authority to control nature. So remember the incident when Jesus was with the disciples in the middle of the storm?

They're hardened fishermen. They know what it's like to be out in a storm, but yet they're fearful for their lives. And so they cry to Jesus, save us. And with a single command, a single command of be still, the winds stop and the waves were flattened.

[7 : 25] It's no wonder the disciples asked, what sort of man is this? Then Matthew tells us about Jesus, the amazing teacher. Time and again, we're told he taught the people, and time and again, we're told they were amazed with his authority.

So if you were standing at the edge of the crowd and you heard him speak, you would have known that what he said was true. You would just have known deep within you that what Jesus was saying was right. And if that wasn't enough, Matthew tells us how he's authority over people.

He calls them and they come. He says that he's authority to forgive sin. So he can tell a paralyzed man his sins are forgiven and he proves it by healing him on the spot.

And then Matthew also says he even has authority over death. He can raise the dead as if they were only asleep because nothing, absolutely nothing was too hard for him.

And now here in the banks of the Galilee, he's the risen Lord. So the healer of diseases, the controller of nature, the amazing teacher, the forgiver of sins, and the one who even raises the dead has himself defeated death.

[8 : 29] And as a result, he's been vindicated as God's Messiah, God's King, and God's Redeemer. Which means when he says all authority in heaven and earth has been given to me, all he's doing is stating the obvious.

And so by the end of Matthew's gospel account, we have an incredible figure of power and authority. Matthew has proven to us that Jesus really is Lord.

And as a result, he deserves our worship. He demands our obedience. And he is worthy of our trust. That's what the book of Matthew tells us.

And I do think we're meant to remember everything he's told us in the rest of the book when we come to read his final verses. But his writing is not the only passage of scripture we should be thinking about as we read these verses. There are many others that help us understand what's going on here, but one in particular must be mentioned, and that one is found in the Old Testament.

I'm sure you're very aware that Matthew was probably written first to a Jewish context. And if you were a Jew and you knew your Old Testament, then these verses would have sounded very like one particular passage.

[9 : 37] And that passage is, of course, Daniel chapter 7. So if you can, please turn to Daniel chapter 7. Now here in this chapter, we're introduced to this incredible figure called the Son of Man.

Son of Man was, of course, a title that Jesus used for himself. And in Daniel 7 verses 13 to 14, we're told something wonderful about this Son of Man.

Because there, Daniel says to us in 7 verses 13 to 14, I saw in the night visions, and behold, with the clouds of heaven, there came one like a Son of Man, and he came to the Ancient of Days and was presented before him.

And listen to this, it says, And to him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion which shall not pass away, and his kingdom one that shall not be destroyed.

Now, there's an incredible amount in those two verses. Far too much for me to comment on now. But when you do a study of these verses and then go back to Matthew 28, what you find is that there's an incredible amount of overlap.

[10 : 48] What Daniel sees in chapter 7 and what Jesus says in Matthew 28 is closely connected. And so if you knew about Daniel 7 and then read Matthew 28, there should be flashing warning lights going off in your head.

Because it's obvious that Jesus is the fulfiller of these verses. And when you look at what Daniel says here, that should bring an incredible amount of confidence to us. Because in Matthew 28, Jesus is our risen Lord and King.

He says he has all authority, and he's sending us out to all nations to make disciples. And yet what he says here is that he is the risen Lord and he's all authority in doing that.

But what we're told in Daniel 7 is really wonderful. Because what we're told is that people from all nations and people groups will serve him. What we're told is that his kingdom is an everlasting kingdom.

And what we're told is that his rule will never end. In other words, we're told the task we've been given will be a success because Jesus has already been given the nations.

[11 : 50] Or to put it another way, the simple plain fact of the matter is, Jesus wins. There's no doubt about it. Jesus wins.

We've been given the result before we even start. Jesus Christ is King of Kings and Lord of Lords. And peoples from every tribe, tongue, and nation will serve him.

His church will be built. His kingdom will never come to an end. The result is not in question. And we know that now. So as Christians, we know we're on the winning side, which surely should encourage us, shouldn't it?

Yes, I suppose some people might have a twisted sense of logic and use the sure victory of Christ as an excuse for laziness. But that's not what happens in the New Testament. Instead, what happens in the New Testament is that the certainty of Christ's victory inspires them on to greater acts of service and sacrifice for the sake of the gospel.

So the authority and power and certain victory of Christ leads them to stand firm in the face of opposition. It leads them to sacrifice their time, money, and comfort. It means they were willing to suffer, sometimes horribly.

[13 : 01] Because they knew the cause of Christ was not in the balance. Instead, they knew the matter had already been decided, and Jesus wins.

And as we leave these verses, I want you to have the same confidence. Because I want you to understand the authority and power and lordship of Jesus Christ.

Because I don't know what the future holds for individual churches. I don't know what the future holds for various Christian organizations. And I don't even know what's going to happen in various countries. But this I do know with absolute certainty.

The church of Jesus Christ will be built. Disciples from every tribe, tongue, and nation will serve him. His rule and authority will last forever. And he will be victorious over every single one of his enemies.

The fact of the matter is, all the forces of hell and all the enemies of the gospel will not be able to stand and stop against the plans and purposes of God. And surely, knowing that, will make a world of difference to how we live and what we do for him in the here and now.

[14 : 11] And so as I finish, I suppose the obvious question that we need to ask is, where does that all leave us? Well, it should leave us with the determination to get involved and do what we're told to do.

Because having understood a little of the authority behind verse 18, suddenly verses 19 to 20 are not nice ideas for a missionary meeting. Instead, suddenly they become our Lord's mission statement for our lives.

And so with these truths in mind, I would encourage you, let's redouble our efforts. Because now is not the time to slap ourselves in the back and slacken off if we've known some success.

Neither is it the time to be discouraged and give up if we've known some disappointments. Now is the time to be determined to fulfill our commission. Now is the time to make the most of every opportunity our Lord gives us.

And I would say to you, now is the time to be grateful. Because guess what? We get to be part of God's plans for the universe.

[15 : 23] And friends, I don't know about you, but I believe that is a huge honor and an immense privilege. Let's turn to our final hymn.

And we'll talk to you soon. Okay, let's turn to our next home, and then just let go. And here we begin to finish the final step. After all you've been going to come up with us, we'll see you soon have, you know, we can hear your first points here, yes.

I promise we'll be coming to the end. Okay. I want to make sure we have a long rush day. Bye-bye. Nice. I'm going to make sure we have this young one and turn to each other help you out. I don't keep doing it. Okay, goodbyin, I'll keep doing it before I move on. Okay, I'll see you soon as well.