

Jesus' Great Commission

Scripture Text: Matthew 28:16-20

Introduction

Last week we celebrated the resurrection of Jesus Christ, when our Lord and Savior rose from the grave after being put to death for the sins of the world. Right after the resurrection, Jesus spent forty days with His disciples, teaching them about the Kingdom of God. Then after spending that time with them, He went back to Heaven to be with His Father and to prepare a place for all His followers. But right before Jesus ascended into Heaven, He gave a charge, a commission, to His disciples. This commission was not something the disciples earned for selling something. This "commission" was a command that gave them authority to do something. That is exactly what Jesus did before He left this world and ascended into Heaven. He gave the Church authority to proclaim His message of peace and reconciliation with God to the whole world.

When we speak of the Great Commission, we often think of Matthew's account, but in fact Jesus' commission to the Church is mentioned in other books of the Bible. In the last chapter of Mark, Jesus told His disciples, "Go into the world and proclaim the Gospel to all creation." This is very similar to the passage in Matthew chapter twenty-eight. In the final chapter of Luke, Jesus told His disciples before He ascended into Heaven that they were His witnesses and that they would receive the promise of the Father. In the first chapter of Acts, Luke wrote about Jesus' announcement to His disciples, how they would receive power from the Holy Spirit, the promise of the Father, and that they would be His witnesses throughout the whole world.

These various accounts confirm the life and work of Jesus is a calling on us all to do something. We believe in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, therefore, we are to share that Good News with others. Jesus did not call His disciples into fellowship with Him, and radically change their lives, so that they would stay in Jerusalem content with the grace they had received. On the contrary, Jesus changed their lives and then authorized them to go into the world and share that change with everyone. That is the same charge the Church has today. Matthew made four main statements about Jesus' Great Commission to the Church:

- Worship the Risen Savior
- Submit to the Authority of Jesus Christ
- Make Disciples of Everyone
- Be Comforted With God's Presence

Worship the Risen Savior

Earlier in Matthew chapter twenty-eight, after Jesus' resurrection had occurred, an angel told Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of James to tell Jesus' disciples that He would meet them in Galilee. Jesus disciples went to a mountain in Galilee, as they were instructed, and saw Jesus there. Now, imagine you were one of the disciples who had spent years with Jesus, learning from Him and

observing the various miracles He performed. Also, imagine that you had witnessed Jesus' cruel death and believed Him to be gone for good, only to see Him alive later and to realize He was who He said He was – the Son of God. How would you respond to Him? What would you do if you had seen the resurrected Lord and Savior? Hopefully you would do exactly what Jesus' disciples did.

When the disciples went to that mountain and saw Jesus, they worshipped Him. This is exactly what the women did when they first saw Jesus after His resurrection. They bowed down before the risen Lord in reverence and humility. Once we come to know who Jesus is, the appropriate response is to worship Him. However, even among Jesus' early disciples, there were doubters. There were some who saw or heard of His death, and then saw Him alive, but still did not believe. But, the appropriate response for anyone who meets the risen Jesus Christ, who comes into His presence, is complete dependence and submission to Him as Lord and Savior. When we worship Jesus as Lord we are recognizing Him as the one we serve, the one we love, and the one we depend upon for life itself. We were created for that purpose – to bring glory and honor to God.

In fact, worship has been something that I have been concerned about for some time. It is why I have tried to be intentional about what we do when we come together as God's people on Sunday morning. Everything we do, whether it is singing hymns, playing music, reading scripture, giving an offering, or simply greeting and fellowshiping with one another, ought to be done for the purpose of *making much of Jesus Christ*. If we are not doing that, then we are missing the point of coming together as the Church. God's people come together to worship Jesus Christ, to make much of Him, and not themselves. Absolutely nothing we do as the Church of Jesus Christ is about us, but about the One who gave Himself up for us. So, let us worship Jesus when we come into His presence.

Submit to the Authority of Jesus

According to Matthew's account of the Great Commission, the first thing Jesus said to His disciples after they worshipped Him was about His authority:

Matthew 28:18 *And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me."*

Jesus' authority is the power to command what He wills. It is also recognition that He is supreme. God the Father has put all things under His Son, Jesus. There are many passages in the Bible that make the same statement. One is a prophecy about Jesus hundreds of years before He was born. The prophet Daniel foretold that the "Son of man" would be given dominion and glory and a kingdom, and that "all people, nations, and languages should serve him." (Daniel 7:13-14) Every person will acknowledge Jesus' authority. Every person is subject to it. His authority is absolute throughout heaven and earth. He is Lord, and yet God the Father is the One who has given Jesus' authority, indicating that Jesus remains subject to the Father. Jesus is God, yet He willingly submits to God the Father.

Since, God the Father has given His Son all authority on heaven and earth, whatever Jesus commands carries supreme weight and ought to be followed. His people, the Church, ought to recognize the authority of Jesus and willingly submit to it. But, the Church should also take comfort in this – it is Jesus’ authority that empowers the Church to fulfill the charge He gave us. Because Jesus has complete control and authority over everything, we can (and should) fulfill the Great Commission obediently, purposefully, and joyfully. We have the command of someone who is above all nations, rulers, and governments. So, what is stopping us?

Make Disciples of Everyone

Therefore, Jesus said, because He has all authority, He commissioned His Church to *make disciples of all nations*. Jesus called His followers to make more disciples of Him from all groups of people through the preaching of the Gospel. Notice, Jesus did not call His followers to invite people to church. Jesus did not call His followers to pass out information about Him in hope that they accept Him. Jesus did not call His followers to show the world a good time. Jesus commanded His followers to make more disciples. That is the main mission of the church. A disciple is one who learns from another, whose life is bound up with the object of his learning, in this case, King Jesus. These disciples were to commit their lives to Jesus as Master and Lord.

Basically, Jesus commanded His disciples to make more of them – to multiply the Church by producing more followers of Jesus Christ. And they were to produce more followers of Jesus Christ from all the nations. The Church was not to be confined to one group of people, but all peoples in the world. To make disciples of all nations is fulfilling God’s promise to Abraham long ago, that from the lineage of Abraham “all the families of the earth shall be blessed.” (Genesis 12:3) Jesus Christ is Abraham’s descendant who will bless every nation, language, and people group through the Church’s obedience to the Great Commission. And Jesus told them how to go about this:

- Go
- Baptize
- Teach

Having Gone

The real command in the Jesus’ Great Commission is “make disciples.” Most translations of this text probably begin with the word “Go.” This seems to say that Jesus is commanding His disciple to first go and then make disciples. However, the real command in this passage, the primary charge Jesus gave the Church is “make disciples.” This assumes that the Church is already going. In fact the real meaning of verse nineteen is “having gone into the world, make disciples of all nations.” We are supposed to already be going. It is not an option.

We do not fulfill Jesus’ command to make disciples by coming to church every week, sitting comfortably in the pews and waiting for God to just bring people to

us. We have to be going out into our communities, into our nation, and into other countries to fulfill this mission. Jesus did not say for His people to wait for the nations to come to us, but for us to go to them. Now, I am not saying we should stop inviting folks to church. I hope we are doing that. But, what I am saying, is if we want to be faithful to Jesus' Great Commission, we have to get out of our homes and out of this church building and into the world. You do not make disciples by inviting people to church. You make disciples by going to them.

Baptizing

Once we are obedient in going out into the world, Jesus told us what to do in order to make disciples. Just going to people is not fulfilling the Great Commission. Many people travel the world and do not make disciples for Jesus Christ. My wife and I love to go on vacation, but that does not mean we make disciples while going. The second aspect of making disciples is baptizing. Now, on the surface this seems to indicate that if we just dunk people into some water then we are fulfilling Jesus' command. That is not so. Imagine traveling somewhere, meeting some folks, and telling them, "I need to obey God, so if you do not mind, let us go over there to that pool, take a swim, so I can check this to do off my list." That person is probably going to think you have lost your mind.

Baptizing assumes that the one who is being baptized has already committed his or her life to Jesus Christ. Baptizing someone assumes that the one who is going out into the world making disciples, is *sharing the good news* of Jesus Christ. It also assumes that the person who is being baptized has made a choice, has professed faith and trust in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. Each example of baptism in the Bible is preceded by a decision to follow Jesus Christ. Peter's first sermon which "cut to the heart" of those listening, included this statement:

Acts 2:38 *"Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit."*

Repentance, turning away from your sinfulness and turning to Jesus Christ is a prerequisite to being baptized. If baptism does not follow repentance and a decision to follow Jesus, then the person being baptized just comes out a wet unbeliever. But if one has made a decision to follow Jesus Christ, baptism marks that person's entrance into the Church. Therefore, to make disciples of Jesus Christ, we are to share our faith with unbelievers in such a way that compels them to make a choice. And if one makes a choice to follow Jesus, then we are to baptize that person in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. The act of testifying to the world that you have made a decision to follow Jesus Christ is under the full authority of God who is represented in three Persons – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. This is an explicit statement of Jesus' deity.

Teaching

The third part of making disciples is to teach them. Once we go out into the world, and share our faith with unbelievers, and if some should accept Jesus Christ and be baptized as a testimony of their new faith, then we are to teach

these newly baptized followers of Christ all that Jesus instructed. It isn't enough for us, the Church, to go share our faith about Jesus, to see a decision made for Jesus, and then to leave that person to work out their faith by themselves. Followers of Jesus Christ are to build relationships with new believers and to teach them all that Jesus commanded. Teaching is a means by which disciples of Jesus are continually transformed to become more like Christ.

Also, making disciples is not about just sharing information with others. It is not just teaching what Jesus said. It is about obeying Jesus. Notice, what Jesus said:

Matthew 28:20 ...teaching them to **observe** all that I have commanded you.

Jesus commanded the Church to make more disciples by teaching them to *obey* all that He had commanded. Disciples are to obey what Jesus has commanded. They are to follow Jesus by obeying everything He has told them. Therefore, the heart of Jesus' Great Commission to the Church is to make disciples of everyone by going out into the world, sharing our faith and baptizing new believers, and having intentional and personal relationships with new followers of Christ teaching them to obey all that Jesus has told us.

Be Comforted With God's Presence

The last statement Jesus made in this passage was one of comfort. Jesus' Great Commission is preceded by a reference to His complete authority over everything and is followed by the promise of His spiritual presence among us. Both are necessary if we are to fulfill our God-given mission. Knowing that He was about to leave them, Jesus comforted His disciples by telling them that He would always be with them as they were making more disciples throughout the world. That is something that should comfort us as well. As we fulfill the Great Commission of the Church, we can be assured that Jesus is there with us. A crucial element of discipleship is the presence of the Master, the one who is "God with us." We are never alone.

Conclusion

In closing, the first disciples were to make more disciples from all nations. This is an ongoing mission. Since the first disciples are now gone and they did not make disciples of all nations, they have left us with work to do. There is work to do. And it is work that the whole Church should be doing. Jesus did not charge only certain people with His Great Commission. He charged all of His disciples – the Church – to fulfill the Great Commission. Are we going to be obedient to Jesus and make disciples of all nations, going to them, sharing our faith and baptizing new believers, and teaching them everything Jesus commanded us to obey? Are we going to do that? Will Jesus find us faithful in fulfilling His Great Commission to the Church? May it be so. Amen!