

## The Great Commission (to make Disciples)

Matthew 28:16-20

If the Great Command: to Love, is crucial to our effective witness to the living Christ, then the Great Commission (not suggestion or option), to make disciples is the marching orders of the Body of Christ. This is the 'Therefore Go' permanent partnership we join when we become Christians. So in this message you will see that the source of the Commission is Jesus, the place where it is worked out is everywhere and on the move, the goal is to make disciples, to serve the master, share the gospel and win the world. The Heart of the Commission like the Great Command is obedience (teaching them to obey), and the promise of the commission is: I will be with you all the way.

Now Churches are growing in all areas of the world apart from North America and Europe: I wonder why? Is it because we have ceased to be risk-takers and become caretakers (take care lest we end up as undertakers), ceased to become pioneers and defaulted to settlers, and we have opted for maintenance rather than mission? Lets be honest for a moment: Christians in the West have largely neglected what it means to be a disciple of Jesus. We have become church members, pew fillers, hymn and song singers, sermon tasters, bible readers, even born-again believers or Spirit-filled Charismatics - but not true disciples of Jesus. If we were willing to learn the meaning of real discipleship and actually to become disciples, the Church in the west would be transformed and the resultant impact on society and our nation would be staggering! This is no idle claim. It happened in the first century when a tiny handful of timid disciples began, in the power of the Spirit, the greatest spiritual revolution the world has ever known. Even the mighty Roman Empire yielded, within three centuries, to the power of the Gospel of Christ. Jesus came with no political manifesto. He rejected all thoughts of violence, shunned all

positions of influence in public life. His plan, which was to change the world in a way that has never been equalled, was astonishingly simple. He drew around him a small band of dedicated disciples. For the best part of three years he lived with them, shared with them, cared for them, taught them, corrected them, trusted them, forgave them, and loved them to the end. They on their part sometimes failed him, hurt him, disappointed him, and sinned against him. Yet never once did he withdraw his love from them. And later, empowered by the promised Holy Spirit, this group of commissioned and trained disciples turned the world of their day upside down.

So let me speak to you this morning of the *Great Claim, Commission and Comfort* mentioned in our reading. But first there is something to notice, something to encourage us if our faith seems tiny like a mustard seed. When the eleven disciples gathered where Jesus had promised to meet them in Galilee Matthew honestly reports that 'some doubted' but 'all worshipped'. Maybe you are in a season of doubt: well firstly don't stop worshipping. Maybe you are in need of a Thomas kind of moment to reinforce your trust and faith: then look with the eyes of faith for that moment: it will surely come. And remember: ever those who doubted were commissioned and were used mightily in the Early Church to usher many into the kingdom and disciple them well.

Then it's as if Jesus takes a step closer (in a Thomas kind of moment) and speaks deep into their very souls:

### **Great Claim**

"All Authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me".

Unlimited authority had been given to Jesus from His Father which enabled Him during His ministry to exercise power over sickness, hunger, demons, wind and waves, human hearts, and even death. In a sense prior to the resurrection this authority was limited to the

person of Jesus, hence the reason why Jesus tried to keep it quiet: to the Blind Man and the Leper the instruction is: don't tell anyone. But now post resurrection: the power and authority are unlimited because His presence is unlimited: it's to be proclaimed to all people everywhere until at the end of the age (as Jesus coins it) when He will raise all and judge all. This is the investiture of the Risen Christ with unrestricted universal sovereignty. Why make this claim? So that we his disciples may know that moment by moment, day by day, we can lean on Him. Truly He is King of Kings and Lord of Lords. But remember this when it comes to Authority: it belongs to Jesus and remains His. It's not delegated to us but it is channelled through us as we do the things Jesus did, in His Name.

### **Great Commission**

Unlimited task for all! So on the basis of the unlimited authority Matthew records what Jesus says to His Disciples, that's you and me if that's what we claim to be:

*Therefore (on the basis of the Unlimited Authority I now have):*  
Because your Lord has so ordered you, because He has promised to impart all the needed strength, and because He is worthy of the homage, faith and obedience of all.

*Go:* (in the Greek present continuous) they must not concentrate all their thoughts on coming to Church. They must also go out to bring the Good News to others. Of Course, they cannot go unless they have first come, indeed they must keep coming and keep going, for we cannot give unless we are willing and open to receive. But there's no mistaking the action required: *Go!* & Do what?

*& Make Disciples:* This is a brisk command even an order: Make Disciples but also Be Disciples! It is not to make converts (for that is a work of the Spirit) but Disciples. Minds as well as hearts and wills must be won for God. A Disciple is a pupil/learner and we must be too: the vital difference with Disciples of Jesus is that they

were first and foremost called to Him rather than a system of teaching or a way of life. The Great Commission requires you and me to proclaim God's truth and will to the world: Sinners must learn about their own lost condition, about God's solution, His plan of redemption in Jesus, and be called to respond to Him. Perhaps the Great Command (to Love) has got us thus far, well now the Great Commission is to seal the transaction of the Cross, the divine deal of Salvation. Of course true discipleship implies much more: mere mental understanding does not as yet make one a disciple. It is only part of the picture, in fact an important part, but only a part. The truth learned must be practiced, it must be appropriated, by heart and mind and will, so that one remains/abides in the truth who is Jesus. Only then can one claim to be Christ's disciple.

*Of all Nations:* all ethnic peoples/all tribes. As Lorna rightly commented, a walk down Canterbury High Street can quickly lead you too a conclusion that the ends of the earth have come to Canterbury! Hence the Great Call to be my witnesses to Jerusalem, all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the Earth. (Acts 1:8) but that's for next week. We do need to understand the culture and history of communities and tribes before we can contextualise and communicate well the gospel message with relevance and revelatory power.

*Baptising them in(to) the Name of the Father, the Son & the Holy Spirit:* Main verb is to 'make disciples' then sub verbs are to baptise them and teach them. Baptism in the Bible is always about adults: those old enough to be considered the objects of preaching. Elsewhere in the Bible we see that Baptism requires: Repentance (Acts 2:38, 41) & Receiving the Word preached (Acts 2:41) hence a certain amount of teaching/preparation precedes baptism normally.

Baptising means being brought into vital relationship with in this case: Jesus. Real connection to Him as a person saves it becoming a mere ritual devoid of power to transform.

*Teaching them to obey all that I have commanded you.* So this proceeds and follows baptism. It is the process of discipleship: best done on the job rather than in the classroom. Mentoring one to one is one of the great privileges given to mature Christians.

### **Great Comfort**

Unlimited Companionship is an offer to all disciples to accompany the Unlimited Authority and Task. I am with you all-ways: even to the end of the age, is the promise so brilliantly fulfilled on the Day of Pentecost and every day since to all believers. There is no vagueness about this assurance. It's not just a promise, it's a fact. Jesus is saying to all his disciples: remember, take note, pay close attention, look. No one less than I myself am with you.

Such an assurance is vital for the missionary task!!

Pastor David

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