

INTRODUCTION

After rising from the dead on the first day of the week after his crucifixion, Jesus appeared to over 500 of his disciples (1 Cor. 15:3-6) over the course of 40 days (Acts 1:3) before ascending into heaven. From this period on earth after his resurrection until his ascension, we only have about (54) mostly short sentences of written account of what he spoke, which are contained within the Gospels and book of Acts. Many of these are also repeats or different accounts of the same interactions.

One of the most important of these accounts is what we have often come to know as “The Great Commission”. While this phrase isn’t found within the Scripture itself, believers from the 1800s on have rightly used this terminology to describe Jesus’ command for his disciples recorded in Matthew 28:18-20 to partner with him in completing this mission which will ultimately fulfill his prophesy in Matthew 24:14, leading to the end of the age and his return from heaven to usher in the fullness of the Kingdom.

¹⁸ And Jesus came and said to them, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. ¹⁹ 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, ²⁰ teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.” (Matthew 28:18-20)

I. JESUS WANTS TO ASSURE US OF HIS POWER TOWARDS US WHO BELIEVE

¹⁸ And Jesus came and said to them, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. ¹⁹ Go therefore...” (Matthew 28:18-19a, emphasis added)

- A. Jesus wants us to know as his disciples that he is sending on this mission, that he is sending us with power and authority that isn’t just over earthly things, but with all earthly and heavenly power and authority.

¹⁶ I do not cease to give thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers, ¹⁷ that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of him, ¹⁸ ...that you may know... ¹⁹ ... what is the immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe, according to the working of his great might ²⁰ that he worked in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places, ²¹ far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come. (Ephesians 1:16-21, emphasis added)

- B. This imbued power and authority for the mission is not just for the original Apostles, but a promise from the Lord for all who believe.

¹⁷ And these signs will accompany those who believe: in my name they will cast out demons; they will speak in new tongues; ¹⁸ they will pick up serpents with their hands; and if they drink any deadly poison, it will not hurt them; they will lay their hands on the sick, and they will recover.” (Mark 16:17-18, emphasis added)

¹² *“Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever believes in me will also do the works that I do; and greater works than these will he do, because I am going to the Father.*
(John 14:12, emphasis added)

- C. As we hear of the command of The Great Commission, are we approaching it with timidity and fear in our own strength, or are we receiving it with peace and excitement because of God’s power and authority in us through the Holy Spirit?

²¹ *Jesus said to them again, “Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you.”* ²² *And when he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, “Receive the Holy Spirit.”* (John 20:21-22, emphasis added)

⁶ *...I remind you to fan into flame the gift of God, which is in you through the laying on of my hands,* ⁷ *for God gave us a spirit not of fear but of power and love and self-control.*

⁸ *Therefore do not be ashamed of the testimony about our Lord, nor of me his prisoner, but share in suffering for the gospel by the power of God,* (1 Timothy 1:6-8, emphasis added)

II. JESUS’ COMMAND WASN’T JUST TO PREACH, BUT TO “MAKE DISCIPLES”

¹⁹ *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,* (Matthew 28:19)

- A. Often when we hear “The Great Commission”, we think of preaching to people. This is certainly part of the equation, but it’s not all of it. The word disciple (Greek: *mathētēs*) describes a person who is a constant learner, pupil, and follower of their teacher. As we see in the Scriptures, disciples aren’t ones who just listen to a sermon, but those who leave their old life behind to follow their teacher everywhere, doing what he does, saying what he says, learning from his words and life example. Discipleship in Christ is a round-the-clock apprenticeship lifestyle adventure.

¹⁸ *While walking by the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon (who is called Peter) and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea, for they were fishermen.* ¹⁹ *And he said to them, “Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men.”* ²⁰ *Immediately they left their nets and followed him.* ²¹ *And going on from there he saw two other brothers, James the son of Zebedee and John his brother, in the boat with Zebedee their father, mending their nets, and he called them.* ²² *Immediately they left the boat and their father and followed him.*
(Matthew 4:18-22, emphasis added)

- B. The call to make disciples isn’t just to people like us, or the type of people that we like or get along with the best. It is to all nations (Greek: *ethnos*), all people groups of all kinds. There was a steep learning curve for this reality in the early Church that was originally made up of all Jewish believers. Even the Apostle Peter wrestled with this part of the call, both before and after (Gal. 2:11-12) he began making disciples among the Gentiles (Greek: *ethnos*).

¹Now the apostles and the brothers who were throughout Judea heard that the Gentiles also had received the word of God. ² So when Peter went up to Jerusalem, the circumcision party criticized him, saying, ³ “You went to uncircumcised men and ate with them.” ⁴ But Peter began and explained it to them... ¹² ...These six brothers also accompanied me, and we entered the man's house. ¹³ And he told us how he had seen the angel stand in his house and say, ‘Send to Joppa and bring Simon who is called Peter; ¹⁴ he will declare to you a message by which you will be saved, you and all your household.’ ¹⁵ As I began to speak, the Holy Spirit fell on them just as on us at the beginning. ¹⁶ And I remembered the word of the Lord, how he said, ‘John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.’ ¹⁷ If then God gave the same gift to them as he gave to us when we believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I that I could stand in God's way?” ¹⁸ When they heard these things they fell silent. And they glorified God, saying, “Then to the Gentiles also God has granted repentance that leads to life.” (Acts 11:1-4, 12-18)

- C. Water baptism and receiving Holy Spirit are essential components of becoming and making disciples in Christ. Even prior to his crucifixion, Jesus had his disciples water baptizing people. This practice for those who believed the Gospel of Jesus was explicitly called for in The Great Commission, as well as always proclaimed and carried out by the disciples throughout the New Testament.

³⁷ Now when they heard this they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, “Brothers, what shall we do?” ³⁸ And Peter said to them, “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.” ³⁹ For the promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself.” ⁴⁰ And with many other words he bore witness and continued to exhort them, saying, “Save yourselves from this crooked generation.” ⁴¹ So those who received his word were baptized, and there were added that day about three thousand souls. (Acts 2:37-41, emphasis added)

III. JESUS COMMANDS US TO TEACH DISCIPLES ALL HE COMMANDED

²⁰ teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you... (Matthew 28:20a)

- A. There are vast amounts of teachings that Jesus gave to his disciples that we are to carry on living and teaching to others, but his commands to us can be overwhelmingly summed up in a couple of simply stated, yet infinitely profound commands.

³⁶ “Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?” ³⁷ And he (Jesus) said to him, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.” ³⁸ This is the great and first commandment. ³⁹ And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. ⁴⁰ On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets.” (Matthew 22:36-40, emphasis added)

- B. The definition of love that God gives us and his character that is shown forth in the person of Christ Jesus is the foundation for all Kingdom living. As he is announcing that he will be leaving and going to the Father, Jesus doubles-down on the importance of the command to love by commanding his disciples to love one another by following the example that he has given in how he has loved us.

³³ Little children, yet a little while I am with you. You will seek me, and just as I said to the Jews, so now I also say to you, ‘Where I am going you cannot come.’ ³⁴ A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. ³⁵ By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.” (John 13:33-35, emphasis added)

- C. This love we are called to embody and teach is not something that we work up in and of ourselves, but something that we receive from our Teacher and Savior, and then impart to others what we have received (1 John 2).
- D. The Great Commission is not just a command for the original Apostles or mature believers, but it is a command to all believers, from the newly born-again to those who have been walking with Jesus for years. Within this commission Jesus commands believers to teach all that he has commanded, including this commission. This should give confidence in the mission to both the mature and new believer, that Jesus is empowering and calling you to join his mission by simply giving to others what he is given you.
- “Be who you are, Say what you know, and Give what you have.”

IV. THIS CO-MISSION HAS AN END

...And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age. (Matthew 28:20b)

- A. Jesus’ last recorded remarks here remind us that we are not alone, and that this is truly a co-mission in partnership with Jesus by his Spirit.

¹² “Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever believes in me will also do the works that I do; and greater works than these will he do, because I am going to the Father. ¹³ Whatever you ask in my name, this I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. ¹⁴ If you ask me anything in my name, I will do it. ¹⁵ “If you love me, you will keep my commandments. ¹⁶ And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, to be with you forever, ¹⁷ even the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, for he dwells with you and will be in you.” (John 14:12-17, emphasis added)

- B. In this final verse of the book of Matthew, Jesus is also reminding us that The Great Commission has an end. This mission is not an impossible task that will go on forever, but one that when completed will usher in the fulfillment of the promise of Jesus’ return and the initiation of the age to come.

³ As he sat on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to him privately, saying, “Tell us, when will these things be, and what will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age... ¹⁴ And this gospel of the kingdom will be proclaimed throughout the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come... ³⁰ Then will appear in heaven the sign of the Son of Man, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory.
(Matthew 24:3, 14, 30, emphasis added)

⁹ The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance. ¹⁰ But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a roar, and the heavenly bodies will be burned up and dissolved, and the earth and the works that are done on it will be exposed. ¹¹ Since all these things are thus to be dissolved, what sort of people ought you to be in lives of holiness and godliness, ¹² waiting for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be set on fire and dissolved, and the heavenly bodies will melt as they burn! ¹³ But according to his promise we are waiting for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells. (2 Peter 3:9-13)

CONCLUSION

- I. Are we opening our lives to receive God’s power through His Holy Spirit?
- II. Are we making room to share the Gospel with people who aren’t like us, and to have a discipleship relationship with people who come to Christ?
- III. Have you believed and been baptized, and are you talking to people about baptism in water and of the Spirit when you share the Gospel with them?
- IV. Are you living your life for the return of Jesus and the age to come?