

The Great Commission

Lesson 5: The Presence of Christ in the Great Commission

Command And A Promise

- › Our gracious Lord and Master, He not only gives commands, but also ensures the results of those commands by his wonderful grace, or he shows the promise of what is to come in those commands. (Matthew 4:19, 6:33, 19:29; Luke 9:23-24; John 15:7)

The Promise of Christ's work of the Great Commission.

- › **Behold** (62x in Matthew). It means to see with attention, but this "seeing" can be multi-faceted:
 - It can mean to become aware. It can also mean to conceive intellectually or spiritually and become conscious of a reality.
 - It can also work as an enactment of the fulfillment of a promise (Matthew 12:41)
 - **Christ says, "Behold, I am with you", not simply just directing our eyes upward, but also outward.** To behold the reality of the efficacy and the actual working of Christ in this commission with you today.
- › Additionally, we also miss that "**behold**" is a parallel command, grammatically, to "make disciples". The promise is not an add-on to the end, meant as a blanket of reassurance, although it has some of that function. Rather, the nature of "behold" is an imperative, two imperatives in this section of scripture.
- › Our mental focus (beholding) is one of being aware of the reality of Christ working ahead of us, and with us, in that, there is a merging of the spiritual eyes and physical eyes, into a one blessed unity to behold Christ's work on this earth, and the Great Commission.
- › That he is with us – in the work, fulfilling His will, by his authority, in his power for his glory.

The Promise of Christ as assurance of success.

- › His presence ensures that the mission will be completed.¹ Without this promise, they (the disciples) cannot be expected to succeed.
- › **I am with you.** This is the reassurance of the presence of God in the lives of the Christian who is to undertake this commission.

¹ RT France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, NICNT, p.1119

- This is not an isolated occurrence here at the end of the book of Matthew. Rather, scholars argue that this is an overriding motif or thematic element of Matthew's Gospel.
- et God's comforting presence is also throughout the bible, specifically as God's people go through trials (Isaiah 43:1-2; 2 Corinthians 1:5).
- › In The High Priestly Prayer (John 17), we have a rare glimpse into the conversation between Christ and the Father that foreshadows the coming commission.
 - 14-19 - I have given them your word, and the world has hated them because they are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. **I do not ask that you take them out of the world, but that you keep them from the evil one. They are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth. As you sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world. And for their sake I consecrate myself, that they also may be sanctified in truth.**
 - 20 "I do not ask for these only, but also for those who will believe in me through their word,
- › The Great Commission then begins this new phase of Christ's ministry through His people. "I am" of the Old Testament became Christ's declaration of "I am", now the "I am" is the "with us".
 - Galatians 2:20 - I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.
- › **He is interceding for us in heaven.**
 - This intercession for his people is at the right hand of the Father. He's working now, bringing our prayers to him. (Hebrews 9:24b)
- › **He is with us, by the granting and working of the Holy Spirit.** Not only is he with us in the Great Commission, but he also empowers us with the Spirit.
 - This seems confusing in some ways, but in a very real sense, certain aspects of God are used interchangeably in Scripture.
 - Colossians 1:27 - **To them God chose to make known how great among the Gentiles are the riches of the glory of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.** (c.f. Romans 8:9)
 - *Is it the Holy Spirit who is in us, or is it Christ in us?* Yes, both/and.
 - The doctrine of **inseparable operation**: The Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit never act independently of one another in creation, redemption, judgment, sanctification, or glorification. Yet within those united works, each Person acts according to His distinct personal property and role.
 - For example, in the atonement, Christ (the Son) offered Himself through the eternal Spirit to God (the Father). (Hebrews 9:14)

- So while the Holy Spirit is the active agent, the unique person of the Trinity. One who dwells in us. As we've seen in the previous two verses, there is also a reality in that the Spirit/Presence of Christ, through the Spirit, lives in us as well. Is not blockaded or, in a lesser degree, yet as intimate as the Holy Spirit.
- There's a very real sense in which we can use these terms interchangeably, as both are true. (Christ is in us, and the Holy Spirit is in us.) Yet the theological reality stands that the Spirit dwells in us, and through the Spirit, Christ also dwells in us.
- › **Error: Believe or feel alone in the work.** Christ tells us that we are not alone; He is with us and will be with us. We are soaking wet in the grace of God as we do this work, as He is with us.
- › **Error: To do it upon our own authority/power.** In the form of pride we take upon this work as loners, we are to accomplish the task ourselves. Christ's being with us is not a backstop on your efforts, but rather the assurance that the work will be done.

The Promise of Christ as unshakable & enduring

- › **always, until the end of the age.**
- › First, “**Always**” translates to “all the days”, meaning that Christ is with you always, all the days of your life. *Always means always.*
 - It's not based on your performance. It's not based on your efforts, your failures, or your successes. Those in Christ have the unshakable promise that Christ is with them in these ways.
- › Second, “**To the end of the age**” means this will persist until Christ's return; it's a promise of endurance.
- › “**End of the age**” this is the time in which the judgment of all people will take place. He uses this phrase in two other places (Matthew 13:40–43, 48–50).
 - This is further indication that this is not simply for the apostles, but for all believers.
- › And just as the promises of God **endure**, this one does as well. There is a time when this commission will end at Christ's return. Until then, we are to strive for **endurance** in the work. The events in time of our world do not shift the promise.

What does this mean for us then?

- › **The presence of Christ is our comfort and our hope in Evangelism**
 - **Means that Christ is with you when you face rejection.** You do not need to fear man, yet should endure, knowing Christ is behind you, is with you, and in front of you. Using all of these efforts for your growth.
 - **Christ sees your efforts even in the lack of results.** How discouraging it can be when we don't see results from our efforts, yet this promise tells us that Christ is with us.
 - **Christ is with us, even if our knowledge is lacking or weak.** Many people fear sharing the Gospel because they feel like they don't know the right information or what to say.
- › **The presence of Christ is the power by which we obey in the Great Commission.**
 - **It is not by our power.** We go in his authority, enabled and equipped by Him and expectant of His working in the engagement of the Great Commission.
 - **The presence of Christ removes spiritual apathy.** The devil, the world, and the flesh are excellent at distracting us from the mission. And one of their chief weapons is not always opposition but simply lowering our desire - creating a sense of apathy. By distraction, by cares and concerns of this world, any means to diminish the fervor for the Lord (Hebrews 12:1-2).
- › **The endurance of the promise shows Christ will return for our accountability and joy.**
 - His promise endures to the end of the age. We'll never be shaken by the lack of Christ's presence.
 - Bear in mind that Christ will return, and we'll be accountable for the work that he commanded us to do (Matthew 16:27; 1 Corinthians 3:12-13; Luke 12:48).
- › **The Promises of Christ can help us select a disciple.**
 - One question that comes up as we think about the Great Commission is, "Who should I pick for my one?:"
 - Elms comments. "Jesus selected on two bases: personal observation and protracted prayer."²
 - He states that one of the key observations you look for in a disciple is a hunger for God. Where does that hunger come from?
 - It comes from the working of the Spirit, **behold!** Christ's work is effective and working. Behold, this man has a hunger.
 - We should not fail to look where the Lord is already working.

² Leroy Elms, *Art of Disciple Making*, p.89