



Matthew 28:18-20
The Great Commission

Summary: God has a plan to transform the lives of people all over the world, and He intends for you to be a part of it.

This morning we return one more time to the Gospel of Matthew, to look at the Great Commission – the final instructions Jesus gave His followers – to share the good news of who He is and what He has done. And so we read that after His death, burial, and resurrection, after everything we celebrated last Sunday, Jesus met His disciples on a mountain in Galilee:

Matthew 28:18. And Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, “All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. 19 Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, 20 teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, *even* to the end of the age.” Amen.

I have brought us back to this passage to discover:

- what it tells us about God,
- what it tells us about others,
- what it tells us about ourselves,
- And finally, what should we do next?

So, first, what does this passage tell us about God? Well, for one, it tells us God is a missionary God - outreach, evangelism, missions, they're all *His* idea. Actually, they're His command.

God *wants* to save people. Jesus' whole life was meant to accomplish this purpose and now the news of what He has done and taught is to be shared with people all over the world.

And that is nothing new. Way back in the book of Genesis, God showed up unexpectedly in the life of a man named Abram, who lived in modern day Iraq and told him:

Genesis 12:1... “Get out of your country,
From your family
And from your father's house,
To a land that I will show you.
2 I will make you a great nation;
I will bless you
And make your name great;
And you shall be a blessing.
3 I will bless those who bless you,

And I will curse him who curses you;
And in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.”

Abram became known as Abraham, the father of Isaac, and the grandfather of Jacob who became known as Israel, who had twelve sons, who founded the nation of Israel, and through them, through their lineage, God brought us Jesus. His mother Mary was a descendant of Abraham and she gave birth to the greatest blessing the families of the earth have ever received.

For a long time, roughly two thousand years, God used the nation of Israel in a special way, and He still has a special relationship with them, but the entire purpose of that relationship was to bring Jesus who would be a blessing to all people everywhere. Israel was blessed in order to be a blessing.

We see that again in what may be the Bible’s most famous verse:

John 3:16 For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.

But do you know what comes right after that verse, in John 3:17?

17 For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved.

The *whole world* is lost without Jesus, so God wants to reach the *whole world* with the gospel.

God is absolutely unbiased, unprejudiced, He says we’re *all* sinners, but He also says any of us can be saved. And, I want to point out – it’s all His idea – the disciples don’t realize they need to do this and then run it by Jesus for approval, no, He tells them, tells us, **Go and make disciples of all the nations** without exception.

In the original language there, the word for nations is *ethnē*, from which we get our word ethnic. It means more than just a nation with geographic boundaries, it means more than just the country that issued your passport or where you pay your taxes. *Ethnē* is more like a tribe or a people group.



Papua New Guinea is an island nation in the South Pacific located near Indonesia and Australia. A little over 8 million people live on the island, but they speak at least 832 languages.

Those are living languages, not dialects. That is ethnic diversity. And God wants to reach people who speak *each* of those languages and make some of them disciples. And He is. Missionaries have been active in Papua since the 1870's learning the languages, meeting the people, and sharing the gospel and today there are hundreds of congregations worshipping Jesus Christ because someone went and told them the good news, just like Jesus said to do.



If you want to see further proof of God's desire to be known and praised by people from *all nations*, just look around this sanctuary or walk down the halls.

In the back corner there's a congregation of Laotian and Thai believers holding a service in their own languages. In the room next to them there are often Chinese believers digging into the Scripture in their own language and in the room right behind us you'll find a service occurring in Vietnamese.

In here, we're using English because that's all I speak, but we're surrounded by people from Nigeria, Cameroon, China, Iran, South Korea, Germany, South Africa, Angola, Haiti, Switzerland, Vietnam, Taiwan, India, Panama, Ecuador, Mexico, Bolivia, Hawaii, Okinawa, Guatemala, Ghana, Bangladesh, Ukraine, Bulgaria, the Philippines, Argentina, Finland and Sweden and others.

Here at City Gates we're training for heaven where people from [all nations, tribes, peoples, and tongues \[will\] stand before the throne and before the Lamb...crying out with a loud voice, saying 'Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne and to the Lamb!' \(Rev 7:9-10\)](#). Get used to worshipping God with a diverse congregation down here because you don't want to look surprised when you get up there!

Two more things to notice about God in Great Commission: He is both the pattern and the power for the command.

Jesus went around doing good for others, teaching others, discipling others. As He said in [Luke 19:10](#) "The Son of Man came to seek and to save that which was lost." He is our pattern for going out, meeting people, and making them disciples.

But He is also our power. This summer we're going to spend some time in the Psalms and Proverbs, and then, beginning in September we will pick up the book of Acts where we see what happened after the Resurrection – how did the early church grow from a few scared disciples huddled in a room praying to thousands of Christians spread across Egypt, Israel, Syria, Lebanon, Turkey, Greece, Rome and expanding outward from there?

Well, the answer is – God gave them power for the pattern. We read in Acts 1:8, Jesus told them:

Acts 1:8 you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.

So, to put it all together – God is the great initiator, it has always been His idea to reach the nations with the gospel – and He invites us to participate in the effort, giving us both the pattern and the power obey.

The Great Commission tells us all of this about God, but it also tells us something about **others**. It tells us there is no such thing as a perfect culture or people.

There are no exceptions in the Great Commission – it doesn't say go make disciples of everyone but the Norwegians and the Peruvians because they've already got it together. No, everyone is to be reached. Everyone is to be told about sin, righteousness, and the judgment to come.

Not all people will receive the news, but all people need to hear the news and be called to discipleship.

And disciples need to be baptized, because Jesus said so. Baptism symbolizes submission to Christ, a desire to be cleansed, a commitment to live according to God's commands, and a desire to identify with the Christian community as the family of God. If you haven't done that – we have an opportunity next Sunday night, right here at 6PM. Just fill out a connection card from the seat back in front of you or grab one at the Welcome table, fill it out, and note on the back that you want to be baptized, then drop it in the tithes and offering box on your way out or drop it off at the welcome table.

We'll send you some information about baptism to look over, you can share your testimony with one of the pastors and then come worship God by obeying His commands next Sunday night during our Family Potluck. This might sting a little, but it's meant to help – how can you be leading others to Christ, pointing them, encouraging them, teaching them to obey His commandments, when you haven't been obedient yourself?

All of this relates to the fact that Jesus says becoming a disciple involves more than just hearing about the gospel, He says, **teach people to observe all the things that I have commanded you.**

My friends, Christianity is more than just coming to church. There are people who have come to church regularly for years who are not saved. Like Judas Iscariot, they spend plenty of time around Jesus, but they don't *observe* all the things He commands. They are not changed.

Christianity is not just about forgiveness for the past, it's about direction for the future – you learn “all that Jesus commanded” and by His grace and with His help you apply it to your life and your life begins to look different from people around you who don't know

Jesus. You talk differently, you dress differently, you celebrate differently, you make different choices *because you are different*, you are a disciple of Christ and you obey His commands.

That brings us to our third point – we’ve seen what the Great Commission has to tell us about God, what it tells us about others, and now, what does this tell us about **ourselves**?

The answer is: God has a role for us to play. There is something for us to do. All Christians are called to be ambassadors for Christ. We are told to obey His commandments and His greatest commandment was to love God with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength, and love our neighbor as ourselves.

So, how does God want to use you to impact people around you? To help them, encourage them, listen to them, model Christ for them and ultimately share Christ with them?

When Jesus says [Go therefore and make disciples](#), you grammar nerds will understand this better than most, but the word [go](#) is in the present imperative form – that means you could translate it – as you are going.

You’re already going through your everyday life, so start by reaching out to the people around you. Don’t think of missions and evangelism primary in terms of something you do overseas, think of it as something you do over lunch or over your fence.

The great commission is not just about asking how can we reach some poor pagan heathen over there, it’s how do I love my neighbor? Our community is not just the place you shield your children from, it’s the place we reach others for Christ. Involvement in your neighborhood and community leads to relationships and relationships lead to opportunities to see and hear about needs, heartache, and loss, and chances to share the gospel, pray, and invite people to worship. Most people are led to Christ by someone they know - either by their words, their actions, or both. And God wants to use you to be that person, because you know people.

So, if the Great Commission teaches us all of this about God, about others, and about ourselves, let’s get practical and ask: what are we supposed to do **next**?

The answer, for many of us is: repent. Because, if we’re honest, we don’t share God’s priorities of evangelism and discipleship. We resist them. We write them off as someone else’s job. Or, we say we’re too busy.

You think “I’m doing my best to hold life together and maybe make it to church two or three times a month. I’ve got a Christian radio station I listen to sometimes and I keep meaning to read my Bible, but life is too busy right now.”

Brothers and Sisters, Jesus told a story about seeds that were planted and they grew up and instead of thriving and producing grain they were surrounded by thorns and choked out.

The point of the story was that the cares and concerns of this world can choke us out spiritually.

Now, you tell me if that's something you can relate to. You tell me if that's a real concern.

Christians, if we are to be like Christ, if we are to let Him have His way in us, it will mean saying no to me more often and saying yes to Him *so that* I can be available in the lives of other people. It's going to mean less "me" time, and more "we" time, and that means God may be calling you to take a long, hard, look at your priorities and calendar. What are the things you're so busy doing that keep you from getting together with other people, and are you sure, are you absolutely sure, you've got the right priorities and interests?

So, we may need to repent. But then, we need to grow. It's not just about what you stop doing, it's what do you start doing instead. And the answer is: grow in the grace and knowledge of your Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Fill your heart, mind, life with Scripture – you can read it in a real book, or on your device, you can have your device read it to you, but learn more of what God has to say, and ask questions about anything you come across. There are no dumb questions, just people who are too proud to ask.

And meditate, chew on Scripture. The whole idea of mindfulness is getting a lot of attention these days, but it's often done in a way that focuses on emptying yourself of all your thoughts and concerns. Christian meditation is about focusing on what God has to say about all your thoughts and concerns. Thinking about a verse or passage or truth to focus on to help cleanse the lens of your life and see things right.

Then, fill your mind your with teaching, podcasts, downloads, however you choose to do it, think about all the media you consume – how much of it is an intentional effort to feed your soul, to grow in your understanding of God, or change your outlook by reminding yourself of truth?

As you grow in your knowledge of God, you're going to naturally grow in your concern for the other people in your life, because you can't spend much time in God's Word or prayer and not realize that He wants to reach people. So, ask Him to help you care about others the way He does as you [Go](#) out into the world.

Ask Him – God, help me see people with Your eyes, help me love them with Your heart, help me to see people's needs and how You want me to encourage them, help them, guide them, pray for them, and reach out to them. Offer to be God's hands and feet.

And then, engage with people. Be generally inquisitive about other people and their conditions. Here's one very easy way to do that: if you notice someone "isn't from around here" ask, "Where is your family from?"

People often light up when you ask about their homeland. And they really light up if you know where their home is They practically burst if it's somewhere you've been.

A few weeks ago our coffee maker here at church broke and we needed a new one, so we found a nice, really nice, industrial coffee maker on Facebook Marketplace for just a fraction of what it would cost brand new. I went to pick it up and met a young man from Sudan who is here as a student – he was working in the store that sold the coffee maker. Well, I’ve been to Sudan, so we talked about that and what I do, and why I’m buying the coffee maker. I wasn’t able to share the gospel, but I still trust that God can use our whole interaction to get him thinking about God, and church, and Christianity and who knows where the Holy Spirit will guide those thoughts???

When you have workers come to your home - minister to them. Offer them a snack, water, tell them where your bathroom is – show them kindness. And then, as you’re signing the invoice or paying the bill, mention the fact that you attend church at City Gates, and give them a card and an invitation. We’ve had nice invitations made up for you to give out, you can take as many as you like. But give them a card, tell them you’ve got some great pastors and if they ever have a question about anything about God, or the Bible, or Christianity, or Church, they can contact us – or they can contact you. Maybe even give them a Bible.

Outreach is not a corporate program, it’s personal priority – a divine partnership between Almighty God and you personally as His child – it is your chance to be a part of what He is doing, up close and personal.

This is all just another way of saying something we say all the time - make yourself increasingly available to God. See what He wants to do through you. Look, there are some hands only you can hold, some hearts and minds only you can reach.

So ask God to use you in the lives of other people. And pray for them, pray for their needs, but most of all pray for their souls.

Charles Spurgeon, the famous London pastor, once said:

“If sinners be damned, at least let them leap to Hell over our dead bodies. And if they perish, let them perish with our arms wrapped about their knees, imploring them to stay. If Hell must be filled, let it be filled in the teeth of our exertions, and let not one go unwarned and unprayed for.”

Pray for our church that we would all have this kind of heart and passion; that we would look away from our phones every now and then and care about the people around us.

And while you’re at it – pray to God to call more people into ministry and the mission field.

Can I remind you of what we read earlier in Matthew? Jesus told His disciples

Matt 9:37 ... disciples, “The harvest truly *is* plentiful, but the laborers *are* few.
38 Therefore pray the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into His harvest.”

In light of this directive from Jesus, I also want to encourage you to do something scary – I want you to pray about whether or not you should go overseas for ministry. This summer we're sending a team to Ethiopia to work with Argaw and Rachel at the children's home they run. Rachel was 14 when she was called by God to go to Ethiopia.

Stephen and I went to visit them a few months ago, and while there we met Mike and Betty. This couple in their 50's had quit their jobs, sold their house, and moved to Awassa to help Argaw and Rachel for a year. One year, doing whatever needed to be done for the kids and the ministry.

And we met Jaden, a young woman in her early 20s who did the same thing, she came to help Rachel with whatever Rachel needs to enable the ministry. Sometimes that's watching Rachel's kids while she runs to the airport, sometimes it's holding babies in the children's home, sometimes it's helping with the dishes while a team from America is visiting. *Whatever needs to be done.* Friends, ministry can take many forms, if you're available.

I don't want to weigh you down with a ton of guilt and a long list of things to do. I just want you to know God is at work in the world, there is more He's going to do, and He wants to do some of it through you.

He has a plan, a purpose for your life, He has people He wants to touch through you. He's inviting you into this enormous, eternal, privilege. So grow in your knowledge of God, grow in your understanding of people around you and grow in your availability to God as you go about your life.

Another way to grow is to read missionary biographies, watch some documentaries, I can recommend plenty. Get a copy of Operation World and pray your way around the world.

And finally, give. Jesus was supported by other people in His ministry. The apostle Paul makes reference to the churches that supported him in his ministry. And for hundreds of years, saints have faithfully given to support the expansion of God's kingdom by giving to support ministry and missions.

When you give to the Lord through this church we use part of those funds to pay for the building – utilities, repairs, upkeep and improvements, because this building is used most days of the week – by Christian home school groups, by Women's Bible Studies, for AWANA and youth groups, for Men's breakfasts, and by outside groups that love Jesus and the Bible – we make space available for them to conduct their ministries – for prayer groups and Bible studies, worship services, and baptisms. There's a lot of ministry that happens in these halls.

Having a building is expensive, but people have been saved here, baptized here, taught here, counseled and fellowshiped here, it is a tool for ministry and we hope to keep it operating in good condition to pass on to the next generation.

We also use part of the funds from your giving to support local outreach on the campus of George Mason University and in the County Jail just down the street.

Some funds go overseas to help support missionaries reaching people from every tribe, tongue and nation by planting churches in Europe, Asia, South America, and Africa.

And of course, some funds are spent on our staff and the ministry that is done for, with, and through this congregation.

There is so much more we could say about this topic, but we're going to end here. And as we do, let me point out that no part of the Great Commission ever went away - there is no time limit or special exceptions to what Jesus taught - we are to teach ALL of it to everyone. We don't outgrow it because our culture changes.

God has a plan for human history and it includes using Christians to care about and love other people.

The Great Commission gives your life meaning and purpose – God wants to use you to reach the people closest to you - you are supposed to be there, to care, to help, to counsel – to point people to Christ wherever you go.

Let's pray.