



## **The Great Commission**

*Series: Matthew: The King and His Kingdom*

Matthew 28:16-20

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Intro We arrive this morning at the great conclusion of the Gospel of Matthew and I dare say that if we understand and marvel at all that we have seen in this gospel so far and yet fail to grasp the importance and the gravity of these final words, all of our learning is for naught. This is the climax of Matthew's gospel for a reason. The truth is this. If we love the One who has first loved us and has proved it by laying down His life as a ransom for sin, making a full atonement for us in our place on the tree, dying to satisfy the Father's wrath on our behalf and who rose again on the third day for our justification, we will care about His last words, His last command recorded for us by Matthew. If we are truly His disciples, we will care about making more disciples to the praise of His glory.

But it seems that whenever we speak of the Great Commission, we reduce the scope of these words to those who are called to a foreign field of ministry or to that subset in the body of Christ who are "missions minded." But that is a grave error, one that spells the difference between a vibrant and faithful church and one that is not.

God has given to His people, Christ has committed to His church purchased with His blood, the mission, the calling to do more than attend services, or to hang out with other believers, to give offerings and sing songs of worship to Him. We should do these things but He has committed a vital mission to us. He has committed to us the mission of making disciples, the mission of making the fame of His name known in the earth so that lost people from every tribe, nation and tongue would confess Christ as Lord and serve Him as King. It is a mission that flows naturally out of worship, out the true fellowship of the believers, out of true spiritual growth and sanctification, out of true faith and out of love for Jesus Christ and for our neighbors in this world. We are called to faithful and obedient instruments in His divine plan to redeem His people in this world.

If we are serious about the glory of God, if it is more to us than words on a banner, we will hear these words and receive them with the urgent desire to see God and His Christ magnified through the redemption of hell-bound sinners because nothing -- nothing -- brings Him more glory than that. If we really love the Lord, we must share in His love for and pursuit of the lost and obey our calling in the mission to seek the lost and bring them to Jesus Christ. This is the reason that we are left in this earth – to witness to the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ and seek that the lost may be saved so that Christ will have the reward of His suffering and so that “the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the LORD as the waters cover the sea.” (Habakkuk 2:14, ESV)

It makes sense that the Gospel of Matthew would end with this call to make disciples and to carry the gospel message forward into all the world. Back at the very beginning of this gospel, he took great pains to show that Jesus Christ was the descendant of Abraham, the One through Whom all the nations would be blessed. The Lord’s Great Commission here at the end of Matthew’s gospel is nothing more than the divine means by which that great vision will come to pass. This is a command for all of us if we are numbered among the people of God, by His grace through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, regardless of our station in life.

Matthew sets the scene for us saying: “Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them. And when they saw him they worshiped him, but some doubted.” (Matthew 28:16–17, ESV) The disciples, just as the women had instructed them, went to Galilee to meet with Jesus. Now we need to understand that this meeting did not happen immediately after the resurrection. There are many things that Matthew does not record for us that took place between the resurrection and this meeting on the mountain – His appearance in the Upper Room, the conversion of Thomas from doubter to full-hearted believer. Neither should we assume that this meeting was only with the eleven, but rather with a host of His disciples. This may be the appearance of Jesus to the more than 500 brothers that Paul mentions in 1 Corinthians 15:6. Realizing this helps us to understand these words a little better.

Apparently at one of His appearances to the Apostles, after His resurrection, Jesus directed them to go to this mountain – a specific place that He had not expressed to the women when He sent them on their way. When the eleven went to the mountain, apparently others went as well, others who had not yet seen the risen Christ. That explains why the eleven worshipped Christ when they saw Him but some, who were unnamed, doubted. Could He really have risen

from the dead? Is this really Jesus? Ever gracious, Jesus draws near to them all, just as he had done with Mary Magdalene and the other Mary, and He vanquishes their doubts with His great claim. Look at it in verse 18.

The Great Claim (v. 18) Matthew writes: “And Jesus came and said to them, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.” (Matthew 28:18, ESV) Jesus sets their doubts to flight with these wonderful words of truth. “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.” Jesus prefaces these last words, His final command, to His disciples with a declaration of His Lordship, with a declaration of His sovereignty, His power, His dominion and authority over all things everywhere. It is probably the greatest declaration our Lord ever made concerning the sovereign power that belongs to Him as the Son of God, the Messiah, and the King, not only of Israel, but of all creation, both seen and unseen.

I want you to see that this word “authority” is a word that emphasizes both the power and the right to do as He pleases as it regards all things that exist. And it is not an authority that He has usurped from God the Father, rather it is an authority that has been granted to Him by the Father because of His obedience as Mediator and Redeemer of His people. It has been given to Him by the Father because He has done all the Father commanded, having conquered sin, having abolished death, and having conquered Satan and the world. And this conferment of absolute authority is fully pleasing to His Father. Just as Paul wrote in Philippians 2 speaking of Jesus: “And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.” (Philippians 2:8–11, ESV) The Father is delighted that the Son would be Lord over all. It is to His glory, the glory of the Godhead, that it is so. Our Lord and Savior’s power is the power of absolute, irresistible, and universal authority. He rules all things everywhere and rules them in totality.

How do we understand such a claim? What does it mean that Jesus has all authority, all power and all right to rule as He pleases? It means that He has all authority over good and evil, over health and sickness, over hearts and lungs and livers, over sun and moon and stars and planets and galaxies, over rain and wind, tornado and flood, over kings and presidents, over nations and cities, over physics and chemistry and calculus, over animals and plants and bacteria, over viruses, over atoms and electrons and molecules, over economies and industry, over feast and

famine, over tragedy and triumph, over war and peace, over trial and tribulation, over angels and demons, over families and neighborhoods, over false prophets and faithful preachers, over entertainment and education, and over everything else that you can think of. In every imaginable corner of the universe there is nothing over which the Lord Christ does not say “Mine.” He makes all things to serve His glory.

He is sovereign King over all, including the souls of every human being that has ever been born or will be born. Christ is the One who has the keys to death and hell and eternal life. He is the High Priest who is Himself the sacrifice for sinners, the fountain of living waters who can cleanse the filthy soul, the way, the door, the life, the light the Shepherd, the refuge for human soul. He is the gracious Savior and Lord who has the authority alone to grant repentance unto eternal life and the forgiveness of sins, the One who has been given authority over all flesh to give eternal life to all whom the Father has given Him as it says in John 17:2.

Jesus establishes first the incontrovertible fact of His absolute authority as the grounds for the commission that He gives to us as His disciples. Think of it. Why would we take the message of the gospel into a world in darkness, to spiritually dead people calling them to repent and believe in Jesus Christ they have no power to do so because their fallen wills are enslaved to sin? Why would we preach the gospel to man and women everywhere whose emotions are enslaved, whose minds are darkened and cannot understand? Only one reason – because Jesus Christ has all authority over heaven and earth and over every human heart to bring the dead to life, the blind to sight, the enslaved to freedom and the unbelieving to faith! He has all authority – the right and the power – to reign over every human heart for salvation or condemnation. He is the sovereign King and what is impossible for man is not only possible, but is certain with God. No power and no will in heaven or on earth, seen or unseen, can resist His will when He exerts His power and His authority as He pleases. Christ has all authority and He wants us, He wants His disciples to know that, especially in light of the commission that He gives us next.

The Great Commission (v. 19-20a) Having established His authority, His right and power to rule and reign over all things for His purpose and pleasure, Jesus says: “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, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you.” (Matthew 28:19–20a, ESV) It’s a clear command: Make disciples of all the nations. Christ leaves no question as to what the kingdom work of the church in this earth is to be. Our work is clearly defined and established

by our Lord who deserves the allegiance, the love, the submission the service and the worship of every human soul everywhere – make disciples. This is a command, a commission given not only to pastors, to missionaries, or evangelists, but to the entire blood-bought church of God in Christ. Just look at the fullness of this statement with me.

Go therefore...”In light of my authority, in light of who I am, Go,” Jesus says, “into all of the world and make disciples.” I have to tell you that there is often a grave disservice done to these words of our Lord. Many times, these words are hijacked, in a well-meaning way by most, to refer only to the call to foreign missions, to the far off field, often referred to as the “front-lines of the battle.” They are narrowed in focus to those who leave behind home and hearth and travel to far-off lands, but that is not what Jesus is saying.

In fact, a better way to understand what Jesus is saying is this: “Therefore, in light of who I am and who you are in me, as you are going into the world – that is – in your living in this world, wherever God has you, wherever God sends you, whether it is in your hometown, or across the street, or across the country, or across the ocean – that’s up to God – you make it your mission to make disciples, to make my name known wherever you go.” The mission field isn’t “over there somewhere”; it is wherever you are. It is everywhere – your family, your neighborhood, your school, your workplace, the organizations you are a part of, your community, overseas, and sometimes even the pew right next to you. The “frontlines” are everywhere.

And let me say this. This going is incarnational just as Jesus coming to this earth was incarnational. In other words, this command requires your bodily participation. Christ came and took to Himself flesh and blood to dwell with us and save us and He sends us out, flesh and blood, to dwell with people with whom we share the gospel. There is no allowance here to simply blog about Jesus, or make you witness known only through Facebook or Twitter or Instagram. Use those things by all means, redeem them for gospel purposes, but Christ’s command goes beyond that to flesh and blood participation. That means we must actively and personally and physically engage the lost world. We cannot be insulated or isolated in our thinking and living as it regards the lost. We cannot have a fortress mentality but instead need to cultivate a real strategy for engaging the lost – not merely from duty but from love for our Savior and love for our neighbor in our home, across the street or 5000 miles away. If we neglect this command of our Lord, where is our faith? Where is our love? Where is the genuineness of our devotion to Him? As you live, wherever God has you, live with the intent of making disciples. “Go therefore,” Jesus says and:

Make disciples of all nations...Who is the mission field? Everyone, people of every tribe, ethnicity and tongue, every color, culture and background, everyone. For the disciples in particular, these words from Jesus opened the playing field wide. Earlier when Christ had sent them out on their missionary journey, He had said to the disciples: "Go nowhere among the Gentiles and enter no town of the Samaritans, but go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel." (Matthew 10:5-6, ESV) Now Jesus was telling them and telling us to go to the people who looked and dressed and acted just like them and to those who entirely different from them, all ethnicities, all peoples, all religions and to make disciples – fully devoted followers of Jesus Christ. He tells them to make disciples of all the nations, look to the fulfillment of His words in Matthew 8: "I tell you, many will come from east and west and recline at table with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven," (Matthew 8:11, ESV) Go make disciples of all nations, of all people.

And that is the key thing that Jesus is saying here. It is the main verb of this entire command – make disciples. Jesus wants disciples -- truly devoted, faithful, transformed followers and lovers and servants of the Lord Jesus Christ who have died to themselves and are alive to Jesus Christ as their King and Lord and Teacher, as the One who commands total allegiance over their lives. He desired His disciples to win more disciples, just like them – men who had left their old lives of sin and selfism for a new life of devotion to Christ.

You see, the goal is not decisions –any good salesman can get decisions. It is not about getting someone to assent to a set of facts or a presentation, not getting them simply to agree with everything that we say but continuing in sin, fundamentally unchanged. That goal is too small, not worthy of Christ at all. Our goal, our hope, our focus, by the grace of God is to make disciples.

To be a disciple requires a surrender of your imagined sovereignty over yourself, a surrender of your heart, your will, your time, your service, your money, your reputation, the whole of your life even up to death. The way of following Christ, of living in obedience to his truth, of living out the commands of the Scripture, of submitting to His will in your daily life and in your plans for yourself and for your family, in this life requires a struggle and a fight by the strength and power of the Holy Spirit who dwells within you – that is the way of the disciple. It is what we are to be and what we are to seek to make as we make the name of Christ known in this world.

We want to see lives radically transformed. We want to see men and women that love the Lord Jesus Christ with all their heart and soul and mind and strength, and their neighbor as themselves. We want to see people that are ready to live for Christ and die for Christ. We want to see people who are consumed with delight in God.

And we do not need to put our collective heads together to try to figure out how to do that. It is no great mystery. Jesus doesn't leave His disciples hanging, trying to figure out how to do this. He gives us very clear instructions in the form of two supporting and defining statements – baptizing them and teaching them. How do we make disciples? First, Jesus says we are to go to all nations, all ethnicities, all peoples...

Baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit...Now what does that mean? Well, it doesn't mean that we just run around dunking people in the water and saying a bunch of religious words over them. Baptism presupposes conversion, presupposes true salvation, real faith. The first order of business is to present the gospel truth about Jesus Christ, in the power of the Holy Spirit, so that people may come to Christ, repenting of their sins, trusting in Him as God in the flesh, trusting in His saving death on the cross and His resurrection and receiving Him as Savior and King.

How do we do that? How do we present the gospel claims of Jesus Christ? We do it by plainly speaking the truth without apology and without compromise. To fulfill the Great Commission, you have to understand and be able to communicate the gospel that you have believed in an understandable way. That is one of the expectations. When Paul was asking for the prayers of the Colossian church, he asked them to: "Pray also for us, that God may open to us a door for the word, to declare the mystery of Christ, on account of which I am in prison— that I may make it clear, which is how I ought to speak." (Colossians 4:3–4, ESV) That prayer of Paul is a good prayer and a right focus for all of us. We simply need to be faithful to tell the truth about Jesus Christ, to do it clearly and faithfully. It does not take flowery words or slick phrases, or marketing acumen – it simply takes faithfulness. If you know Jesus, speak of Him.

It also takes integrity. It is not enough to simply speak the gospel; we must live it out. The gospel must be evident in the way that we think, in the way we make decisions, in what we

value, in the way that we interact with our family and friends, serving, loving, forgiving, caring for others. It has to be evident in our priorities, in our faithfulness to Christ and to His people, in our joyful obedience to His commandments, in a high regard for the Scriptures. We need to speak the gospel and live the gospel. Just speak and live your life out loud in every circumstance.

Now listen, this does not require some new program or some special emphasis – this is who we to be, this is what we should be by the power of the gospel and the power of the Spirit if we are children of the Living God. Real disciples love God, love His truth, love His Lordship, love His glory, love His people, love to obey Him and they love their neighbor as themselves. And as we present the claims and the person of Christ, we trust that the Holy Spirit will use that witness and regenerate dead souls and bring people to faith in Christ, faith that is testified to by the beauty of baptism.

What is baptism? It is a picture of our union with God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit through the saving power of God and faith in Jesus Christ. That is what baptism is. It represents this vital union with God, the death of our old lives and the beginning of a new life that is entirely, profoundly, and absolutely bound up with the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. It is the response of faith in Christ, a public declaration of faith in Christ's personal work and in His love to save a sinner from hell and death, making him or her, by faith, the recipient of new life, a saved life, that is rooted and grounded in Him. It is a personal confession of personal belonging to Jesus Christ as His own – that the purpose of his life, the aim and the desires and the living of it is defined by the will and the interests and the purpose of the Living God, united to Him as Head and Master, and as the supreme object of affection. That is where discipleship begins.

Do you see the personal nature of this? We are not calling people to a system of thought, to a set of religious principles, to historical facts, or a theological system, to a loose affiliation with some group of people; we are calling them to a person, to Jesus Christ, to a personal faith in Christ and to following Him as Master and Lord. Baptism represents a personal response of faith to the claims of Jesus Christ, a personal submission to Christ as Savior and Lord. That does not mean that faith in Christ and following Him as a disciple is merely personal in the sense that it involves just you and Jesus, just that person and Jesus, solo discipleship. No, being a disciple means living in communion with Father, Son and Holy Spirit in the community of His people, also in vital union to Christ, where this new life can be lived out. It isn't just baptize them and



send them on their way. Baptism speaks of community where Jesus tells us to make disciples by baptizing them and:

Teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you...Why does Jesus say this? Because disciples are not made by baptism alone, but true faith is to lead to people who receive Christ as Savior and who serve Him as their King in the fellowship of the church. Do you see what Christ is saying, a disciple is someone who responds in faith to the gospel, who publically proclaims his union with and life in the Triune God and who acts in the knowledge and in obedience to the truth as it has been revealed in and through the Lord Jesus Christ.

In other words, the goal is not merely people who make an outward expression or profession of faith, but people who live and walk according to the words of Jesus Christ – who live in practical obedience to His word and strive to live in the way that He commanded. This is what a disciple does.

As we have seen throughout this gospel, Jesus teaches not simply to entertain or to reveal interesting truths about God. He is concerned for His disciples' way of life, that they would live in a manner that is fully pleasing to God which is now made possible by His gift of the indwelling Holy Spirit.

This is so important for us to understand. The profession and the practice go together. In so many "so-called" churches we see the exact opposite. Instead of teaching all that Christ commanded many are trying to eliminate as much as possible, trying to avoid whatever may be considered objectionable. As a result they teach grace without judgment, love without justice, salvation without obedience, and a crown without a cross. But listen: strong, vibrant, true disciples are not made by watered down teaching. There is a reason that Christ gave gifts to His church. "And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ," (Ephesians 4:11–13, ESV)

It is the command of Christ to His disciples to teach believing sinners all that Christ has commanded us. No church and no disciple has any right to modify or amend the doctrines of Christ, to dismiss any part of His word as insignificant, or to hold back anything He has taught. We have no right to add anything to the Word of God or to invent doctrines of our own that seem more pleasing to people. We have no place deciding what people need to hear and know. We are responsible to teach exactly what Christ has commanded in his Word, and expounded throughout the entire Bible, all of it. This is how disciples are made and how they are multiplied. We call all people to be fully devoted followers of Christ, together with other disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ in the local church, and together to magnify the name of the Lord, to grow in grace and truth, to become more like Christ, and to go and to make more disciples.

The obvious question, as Paul asked, is “Who is sufficient for these things?” None of us are. Not in ourselves. We do not have the power to save, do not have the power to change the human heart, do not have the power to raise the dead to life, but we do not have to. That is why Christ finishes His command with this declaration of:

The Great Certainty (v. 20b) As we are about the Lord’s business of making disciples, here is not merely the promise but the certainty, the fact, which should give strength to our souls: “And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.” (Matthew 28:19–20, ESV) Are you overwhelmed at this command? Behold, Christ is with you, both to will and to work through you. I can conceive of no greater encouragement, no words more strengthening, more comforting than these. Christ is with us always. He came to be “Emmanuel, God with us” when He came into this world to save us and He tells us here that He is ever God with us. To quote JC Ryle: He is with us daily to pardon and forgive--with us daily to sanctify and strengthen--with us daily to defend and keep--with us daily to lead and to guide--with us in sorrow, and with us in joy--with us in sickness, and with us in health--with us in life, and with us in death--with us in time, and with us in eternity. And let me add, He is with us to empower us and through us to ensure that His commission is fulfilled.

There is a reason that Matthew does not close His gospel with an account of the ascension of Christ, as do the other writers of the synoptic gospels, Mark and Luke. It is because He wants to emphasize the very real spiritual presence of Christ with His people. That is the last certainty He wants ringing in our ears and resonating in our hearts. ““All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. 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, 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, ESV) This is the great commission and it impresses on our hearts some great implications.

The Great Implications Do you see it? There are some great implications that come out of this great commission. Let me just give you some.

There is a disciple to be. As I said earlier, we want to see people become disciples, to see lives radically transformed. We want to see men and women and children that love the Lord Jesus Christ with all their heart and soul and mind and strength, and their neighbor as themselves. We want to see people that are ready to live for Christ and die for Christ. We want to see people who are consumed with delight in God. And if we want to see that, we must, by God’s grace, be that. You cannot make what you are not.

There are disciples to make. I know we would all agree that disciple making must begin at home and that is absolutely true. A faith not passed on to our children is hardly a faith worth having. We must be diligent to put Christ before our children and our families all the time in the way that we speak and in the way that we live, using every means of grace at our disposal seeking for their salvation and sanctification. But though, disciple making should start in our homes first, it cannot be in our homes exclusively. Jesus knows nothing of disciple making in the home only. There is a world to be reached, people that are sinners, people who may not love us but whom we need to love with the love of Christ who saved us when we were ungodly and enemies with God. As I said earlier, there can be no fortress mentality in the body of Christ. A church turned in on itself is a church that is worthless to the kingdom and can hardly be called a church, if at all. As I said, each of us must cultivate a real strategy for engaging the lost – not merely from duty but from love for our Savior and love for our neighbor. To fail do so is call the validity of our faith into question. Christianity is a missionary faith.

There are great challenges to be confronted. In our age, universalism – the thought that all people go to heaven, relativism and pluralism– that all religions are legitimate paths to salvation, secular atheism – a profession that there is no God rooted in a profound hatred for God who has inescapably made Himself known through the things He has made, the great god

of tolerance that hates the unbending nature of truth, and of course, the depravity of man and his love of sin that transcends every age – these are the great challenges as we seek to make disciples. They seem formidable, but none of them is insurmountable by the power of Christ. We are not called to focus on the challenges, but to focus on Him who said: I am with you always, to the end of the age.

There is a great Christ to be proclaimed and there is a great harvest to be gathered. God has His elect throughout this earth, those whom He has chosen for Himself, who will hear the gospel call, who will respond in faith, and who will live for the praise of Christ's name. He will have his elect people and Christ will gather them through the faithfulness of His true disciples as we declare the matchless perfections, the glory, the grace, the love, the justice, the holiness, the mercy, the worthiness, the wonder, the gospel, the commands and the callings of our Lord Jesus Christ and the salvation and judgment that are entrusted to Him. As I said at the very beginning of this sermon, if we love the One who has first loved us and has proved it by laying down His life as a ransom for sin, making a full atonement for us in our place on the tree, dying to satisfy the Father's wrath on our behalf and who rose again on the third day for our justification, we will care about His last words. If we are serious about the glory of God, if it is more to us than words on a banner, we will hear these words and receive them with the urgent desire to see God and His Christ magnified through the redemption of hell-bound sinners because nothing -- nothing -- brings Him more glory than that. And it leaves us this morning with one great question. One question, that can be asked in a couple of ways.

### The Great Question

What are you doing to fulfill this great commission of your great and incomparable Lord, to the praise of His everlasting glory? How are you living your life for the King and His Kingdom?

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