

## The Great Commission or Omission

### Matthew 28:18-20

“In the beautiful Blue Ridge Mountains in western North Carolina you will discover Ridgecrest, a 1,300-acre Christian conference center where you can leave your cares at the gate. Since its founding more than 100 years ago, Ridgecrest has welcomed over one million guests. Through the years, God has continued to work in the lives of those visiting Ridgecrest Conference Center. Ministers and missionaries have been called, thousands have been saved and godly relationships have been formed.”

That is the opening paragraph of its website advertisement. Every year thousands of Christian people, young and old alike, travel there for training, inspiration, Bible study, and challenge.

A few years ago, during one of their many conferences, people began to notice a man hanging around the grounds. He did not look like he had just stepped out of your typical Sunday school class. His clothes were tattered and torn, looking like something that even Good Will or the Salvation Army would discard. His face had not seen the edge of a razor for a long time. The shoes he wore reminded one of the old hymn “Holy, Holy, Holy.” His BO was nauseating. Not even Right Guard or Old Spice would have helped. He was clearly not the kind of person you normally see at a Christian campground.

You might wonder what such a person might do in a place like that. He didn’t approach anyone. He didn’t ask for money. He just mostly hung around. When chapel services were held, he would walk across the front and sit down. When classes were under way, he would lie down on the grassy slopes nearby. When meals were served, he would stand on the dining hall porch, not far from the lines of people clutching their meal tickets. He didn’t beg. He didn’t demand. He just hung around.

At the closing service they sang their hymns, they

prayed, a choir performed special music and then it was announced that there would be a special speaker. Out came the scruffy young man, the bum with the worn-out clothes, the messy beard, and the offensive BO. It turns out he was a young pastor who had been asked to play the part by the conference organizers. That evening he told the crowd that no one had tried to include him in any activity. No one asked if he needed help. No one invited him to the dining hall. No one sat down to listen to his story. A few gave him religious tracts. Some gave him several dollars. But most turned their eyes and pretended not to see him. His appearance offended them and so they left him out of their circles.

With that as our introduction, please take your Bible and turn to a very familiar passage. It is familiar because we often refer to it as the Great Commission of Jesus. It is His final words to His disciples before departing to Heaven. One pastor likens this passage to our marching orders, the instructions we are given to carry out the plan of Jesus to fulfill the promise to build His church. The illustration and this passage compel us to consider our response and responsibility to the lost, no matter who they are, no matter where they live or how they dress. It is a mirror that forces us to take a look at the reflection we see about our attitude toward those who are yet without Christ whether near or far.

We may look at some and conclude that they appear to be the least likely to respond to the gospel so we wash our hands of the responsibility or figure that someone more qualified will or should do it.

They may be hard living, heavy drinking bikers, leather clad from head to toe with more tattoos and piercings than there are days in the year. They may be the jet setters of Hollywood who drive life in the fast lane and seem to have as much room for God as someone trying to pack one more sardine in a tin. They may have been born with a silver spoon with all the creature comforts one expects them to have

in an effort to bring their otherwise empty life a little joy and peace on earth. They may be the scantily clad indigenous tribe left over from the stone age found in some remote jungle of a third world country with bones sticking through nose or cheek or ear cavities. It makes no difference. They have one thing in common, they are without Christ.

We look at some people and conclude that they are the farthest from being receptive to the gospel so why bother. It's like the bar tender said in episode four of Stars Wars "we don't serve their kind here." They aren't like us so how could they possibly be interested or even understand.

We may look at neighbors or coworkers or relatives or classmates and conclude that we are too much like them instead of being very different from them. We shop at the same stores, our kids go to the same schools, we drive the same cars, we eat at the same restaurants, we dress like them, talk like them, watch the same TV programs and if I share the gospel they may realize that what I proclaim I may not practice so it's better just to be a chameleon and blend in.

Instead of the Great Commission, it is the Great Omission. If you haven't yet, find your way to **Matthew 28:18-20**.

So let's delve into this commission that was given by our Lord to the Church. We see the following:

The claim by Jesus to the church

The commission from Jesus for the church

The comfort of Jesus in the church

## I. THE CLAIM BY JESUS TO THE CHURCH – v. 18

We learn from the previous verses that in obedience to the Lord His disciples went up to a mountain where they had been instructed to meet Him. Verse 17 says that some doubted. They were skeptical for some reason. It wasn't the first time He had

appeared to them since His resurrection but for some reason doubts still remained about Him. It's probably best we don't know who they were. There isn't any merit in knowing. What is important is in what Jesus tells them next, in spite of their doubts. It is a word of reassurance to them that it was Him and who He claimed to be and what He wanted them to do in His absence.

Notice His words in **verse 18: "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me."**

### A. The Extent of Jesus' Claim

The verse begins by telling how much authority has been given to Jesus. It's important for us to understand the extent or reach of His authority in order to then know the extent of the commission He will give in the next verse.

The verse says **"ALL authority"** has been given to Him. Say that with me - ALL AUTHORITY.

Someone has said that **"All means all that's all all means."**

It's a word that means the whole extent or quantity, the greatest possible, all inclusive, everything. So when we consider the extent of His authority that all of it was given to Him we mean that His authority is over everything. Nothing falls outside it.

Our Church Constitution outlines on page 7 the responsibilities of the Board of Deacons. **"Under the authority of the pastor, the Deacon Board shall administer those affairs of the church which are not delegated or reserved to others. They shall have, with the Pastor, spiritual oversight of the church."** That statement is all inclusive as it relates to anything that has to do with this church. It does not give them authority over the church down the road or any other church.

Jesus was given authority over everything (say that) and this authority was given by God the Father.

Paul notes in **Ephesians 1:20-22** that Jesus is now seated at God's right hand **"above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every title that can be given, not only in the present age but also in the one to come. And God placed all things under His feet and appointed Him to be head over everything for the church."**

**Doesn't that sound like He's been given all authority?**

Before we go any further let's define authority so we understand what it is Jesus has been given because it will help us understand why He can command of us what He does.

Authority is an official position along with the power or right to give commands, to enforce them, to take action and to make decisions. **I may one day be caught by you speeding, you may attempt to give me a ticket and collect a fee, but you don't have any authority to either give me a ticket or enforce the penalty for speeding. On the other hand a police officer has every right to do so because he has been given that authority.**

Some translations use the term power instead of authority. It doesn't mean that He has the strength to be in charge but rather that He has the right to be in charge. That authority came from the Father to the Son. He had it before the incarnation but during the incarnation He gave up or limited Himself some of the authority He was otherwise entitled to.

He had authority to forgive sin.

He had authority over demons.

He had authority over disease.

He had authority over death.

He laid aside His authority to rule the nations.

Now He was telling the disciples He had all authority given to Him. He was in control of everything. He is the rightful, legal authority. He

didn't usurp the position by force. He didn't assume the position was His. He didn't demand the position. It was given to Him by God the Father.

Daniel had a glimpse into the authority given Jesus. **"In my vision at night I looked, and there before me was one like a Son of Man, coming with the clouds of heaven. He approached the Ancient of Days and was led into His presence. He was given authority, Glory and sovereign power; all peoples, nations and men of every language worshipped Him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that will not pass away, and His kingdom is one that will never be destroyed."** (Daniel 7:13-14)

**Why did He reveal His authority at this time to the disciples?** I think it was so we could learn to trust Him. I think it was so we could understand the weight, the force, the magnitude and the extent of His command. I think it was so we could know He was our Master whom we should serve and obey. He expresses the authority that has been given Him to the disciples. The extent of His command demands our obedience.

Then we also see the expression of His claim.

## **B. The Expression of Jesus' Claim**

**"All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to Me."**

He was expressing this command to those who are His followers, to all who believe in Him. This authority was given to Jesus and to no one else. His supreme authority gives us the assurance we need to accomplish the task He has asked us to do because it is a huge task. If the authority has been given to Him to invoke us to do a task, He will give us the power to do it.

**For example, if you own a business you have authority over that business. As the one in authority**

you express to those who work for you the plan to accomplish your goals and then you give them the tools to do what they need to do make your business successful.

The extent of Jesus' authority means He will give us what we need to accomplish His plan. To accomplish the plan He is about to lay out He needed to have all authority. *And we see that Jesus was given authority over heaven and earth.*

**Have you ever stopped to think about how big the earth is?** The circumference of the earth is 24,901 miles. Now if I run 50 miles a week it would take me 498 weeks or roughly 9.5 years to run one time around the earth.

Now thinking more about the earth, let's move past the sheer volume of the planet and consider that the earth has seven continents and within each continent there are multiple countries and within each country there are multiple states and within each state there are multiple local municipalities. Each has a form of government that guards and guides its citizens. This verse says that Jesus has authority over all the earth.

But that's not all. He has also been given authority over all heaven. Now this means the expanse of space in which we consider the magnitude of the universe with its countless galaxies.

NASA showed a picture of our galaxy so that it was about the size of a quarter. To put things into perspective they noted that the sun around which our planet revolves would be the size of a speck of dust. It is approximately 93 million miles from the earth to the sun. That's just our galaxy and solar system.

Scientists believe that the universe is 93 Billion light years in diameter, but they are only guessing because no one has ever seen the edge of the universe if one even exists. Now if a light year is

approximately 6 trillion miles one would take 6 trillion miles times 93 billion light years to come up with an astronomically huge number for the size of the universe and Jesus has authority over it.

But it isn't just the physical universe that Jesus has authority over we also mean that He is ruler over the sphere or realm in which He now resides, a place we also call heaven. He rules over a dimension not seen with the physical eye, but a place where one day we will go to live with Him. That too is called heaven. His authority is vast; it is all encompassing of both the visible and invisible realms. That is the claim of Jesus to the church. All authority has been given to Him.

We next see the commission from Jesus to the church.

## II. THE COMMISSION FROM JESUS TO THE CHURCH – v. 19-20a

That Jesus reveals the authority He has lays the foundation for the commission He will now give. A commission is defined as an authorization to perform certain duties or tasks, or to take on certain powers. This is what has been given by Jesus to us.

As we saw in the previous verse we see here as well both the extent and the expression of that commission.

### A. The Extent of Jesus' Commission

In essence the church has been authorized by Christ to perform certain duties. Those duties are laid out for us in this passage.

**“Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded.”**

The emphasis is not on the word “GO”, but on making disciples. The word “go” is not a verb but a participle. A participle is a word that has both qualities of a verb and an adjective. In this case the word “go” is a present participle and could be stated to mean “in your going.” The assumption that Jesus is making is that we are going and that our going is a continuous action so that while we are going we make disciples.

As we go to the mall – make disciples.

As we go to school – make disciples.

As we go to work – make disciples.

As we vacation – make disciples.

As we teach Sunday school – make disciples.

As we travel – make disciples.

Wherever we go – make disciples.

Whenever we go – make disciples.

Notice a very important distinction or omission here. Jesus did not say in your going make converts. He wants more than just people who believe in Him. We are to make disciples. The word disciple comes from a root word that means to learn. The intent of the word is to learn from someone you follow and then do what they do. We might call that person an apprentice.

Making disciples is a fundamental part of the church. That responsibility has been given to us by the authority of Christ as a means of carrying out His plan until He comes back. It is by the authority of Christ and as **J. Vernon McGee has noted that it is “In His power [that] the Great Commission can be carried out.”** It is by His power because it comes from His authority.

Earlier in His ministry Jesus told the disciples that their focus was to be the people of Israel. They were to take the gospel message of the Kingdom of God only to the lost sheep of Israel (**Matthew 10:5-6**). Now Jesus was giving them and us a broader reach with the gospel. It is to be to all nations, emphasizing the continuous nature of the work. We looked last week at Revelation 7 where the promise

to Abraham is fulfilled when John saw in his vision that someone from every tongue, tribe and nation was seen around the throne giving praise to the Lamb for the salvation He brought.

The scope of the commission Jesus has given to the church is global in its extent. We are to go to all nations and make disciples. With our nation becoming an even bigger melting pot of people groups we don’t have to go to other nations, other nations are coming here.

In the first six centuries there was great zeal by the church for carrying out the Great Commission. The next 1,000 years was called by Rome the Age of Faith yet, we call it the Dark Ages. **Henry Ironside called it “an eclipse of true gospel activity.”** Spiritual darkness was pervasive.

The Protestant Reformation brought about a new interest in missions to spread the truth of God’s Word to people who needed to know that the **“just shall live by faith.”**

Then the Great Awakening brought revived interest in the church to take the gospel to the ends of the earth where for centuries it had been ignored.

The extent of the commission given by Jesus is to all nations. The extent of the commission is also to all who are followers of Jesus. That commission has not been changed or rescinded.

**Ironside also pointedly notes about the Great Commission that “this is the first great business of every member of the church of the living God.”**

It is not the sole responsibility of paid church staff or of a mission’s committee or of individuals called to a specific field - foreign or domestic - with a burden to share the gospel of Christ with those particular people groups. The extent of the Great Commission is not just to all the nations, the extent of the Great Commission is that all who claim the

name of Jesus as Savior have an active part in making disciples. There must be what **Ironside** calls “a divinely implanted love for the lost.” Such a love stems from a zeal for the One who gave us those marching orders, to think of them as being eternally separated from Christ.

Of the 2,000 passengers on the Titanic, 1,517 were lost at sea. At the time the Titanic went down, another ship, the California, was only 30 miles away. The Titanic’s operator frantically sent out an SOS messages repeatedly; but the wireless set on the California was closed because there was only one operator aboard and he had gone to bed. Help was available but the California sailed on its way totally unaware of the tragedy.

There are those around us sinking in sin and desperately in need of rescuing. We have been appointed by Christ to go to them and share the good news that they too might become disciples. If we are not spreading the gospel then we are merely a convert and have not fully embraced what a disciple is or does. Evidence of growth in a disciple is when they themselves also become a discipler, someone who also is carrying out the Great Commission.

We endeavor to make disciples through efforts like Sunday school, VBS, small groups, partnering with missionaries, sharing our faith over a cup of hot chocolate. It is more than just living a Christ like life before others; it is a verbal testimony about Christ. Making disciples must both be spontaneous and systematic. Be ready always to give an answer for the hope that is in you, but also plan opportunities as well. You can go online to the Pocket Testament League and order free Gospel of John booklets to pass out. If you don’t have a computer you can call me and get the number to call and order them. Take them with you and pass them out to people.

The State of this nation is the way it is because we have been a reluctant witness. The extent of the commission given by Jesus is to go to the nations and every Jesus follower is to be engaged in that task. He does not tell us how to take the message just that it is to be taken. There is one message but many methods and many messengers.

When Jesus said that we are to go to the nations, in His book there are no closed doors because His Word says people from every tongue and tribe and nation will be around His throne.

Next notice the expression of Jesus’ Commission.

## **B. The Expression of Jesus’ Commission**

As you go making disciples there are a couple of things that give evidence that a person is becoming a true disciple. The first is baptism. It is a God ordained command. This is not a part of salvation but a visible declaration and demonstration of what has taken place in the heart. You may be here today and have yet to be baptized. It’s a demonstration of your faith and obedience to the Lord. Baptism is a part of making disciples.

Another important part of making disciples is teaching the commands of Christ. But teaching falls short if the person being taught doesn’t obey those commands. According to **John 14:21** Jesus said obedience is a way we demonstrate love for Him. Part of making disciples by the church, the body of Christ, is to help a person grow in their faith. We have the responsibility of teaching the whole counsel of God. Again this is the responsibility of every believer, not just your pastor or Board or Sunday school teacher. It must be something we all participate in doing. While baptism is a onetime event to show the one time experience of salvation, teaching is a lifetime process of learning. Both of these are acts of making disciples.

Finally, and I mean finally, notice the comfort of Jesus to the Church.

### III. THE COMFORT OF JESUS TO THE CHURCH – v. 20b

**“And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”**

#### A. The Extent of Jesus’ Comfort

The promise He makes here is far reaching. He is with us every minute of every day and that promise will be the same until the Lord calls us home by death or by decree when He returns. The extent is also to all believers. If you are a believer Jesus’ promise is for you – it’s always.

This promise assures us of His favor. **Hudson Taylor, the great missionary to China once said “God’s will done in God’s way will not lack God’s support.”** That is the extent of the comfort Jesus gives the church in their making disciples. He is with us as we go make disciples.

#### B. The Expression of Jesus’ Comfort

**“And surely I am with you...”** This is more than a promise, it is a pronouncement. There couldn’t be any greater assurance or comfort than to know that as we go, wherever we go making disciples He has given us the promise of His presence at all times. We will look at that a little more next week. But suffice it to say today that **“He will never leave you or forsake you.” (Hebrews 13:5)**

We may think we are inadequate for the task, but that the Lord has given us this promise assures us that He has confidence in us to carry out the commission. As I see it the issue is that we are not utilizing the power that is available to us to be bold witnesses. Instead of claiming the power and authority that is ours in Christ and by Christ we are fearful of what other people will think or say or we

are fearful about trusting the Lord for the resources when He asks us to step out in. We can be assured that what the Lord asks us to do He will give us the enabling power to do it.

Many want the church to be a place where the unsaved can feel warm and fuzzy when they visit. Some would just as soon have the church be a place where the saved can hunker down away from the fray. We are told to go. No battle was won by staying in the camp. In our going He is with us.

There is a story about a man by the name of Mr. Wahlstrom who purchased an old bombsight. To see what made it work he took it apart. As he began to put it back together, he decided to add to it some spare parts he had from other projects. Over time, friends and neighbors took an interest in it and started bringing him parts and pieces, which he incorporated into his contraption. Over a period of about 10 years, he added to his machine hundreds of wheels and cogs, belts and whistles and gears and who knows what all until the thing became “a marvel to behold.” He would throw the switch and the machine’s thousand pieces would begin to move. Wheels turned, lights flashed, bells rang, and belts whirred. The device came to be known as “Wahlstrom’s Wonder.” The only thing is, it didn’t do anything. It just went through the motions.”

**Are we fulfilling the commission given to us by the Lord by making disciples or are we just going through the motions?**

By His authority, He has commissioned us and empowered us to carry out His plan for the nations. The resources are available. The claim of Jesus’ authority has been substantiated by the Father who gave Him this authority. It was His to give. It was Jesus’ right to receive. It is Jesus’ authority that writes about to the **Philippians (2:9-11) “Therefore God exalted Him to the highest place and gave Him the name that is above every name, 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.”**

What we do when we make disciples is bring glory to God. It’s either the great commission or great omission.