

Our Commission Matthew 28:18-20

Vance stands out in a predominately Hispanic neighborhood because he is African American. But what really sets him apart is that he is a servant-hearted father who cares not only for his own kids, but also for the many other kids who play in the streets by his building.

One night there was a knock at his door. A 16-year-old boy who lives a few doors down needed help tying his tie. He had a big presentation at school the next day, and he had no father to help him get ready. After Vance finished tying the tie, the boy sheepishly asked, "Do you have a pair of black dress shoes I could borrow?"

Immediately, the Spirit brought to Vance's mind the \$60 pair of shoes in his closet that he hadn't even taken out of the box yet. He was certain God was telling him to give the boy those shoes.

Vance cringed inside. He told the boy to wait as he headed into the apartment to look for any pair of shoes but the expensive pair. Before he went to the closet, though, he told his wife what he sensed the Spirit was saying to him. She agreed that it sounded like God had given him a great idea. So he got out his new shoes and brought them to the boy. He hoped they wouldn't fit. After all, how many 16-year-olds have size-12 feet? They fit perfectly.

Just a few weeks after Vance gave away his new shoes, he and his wife sensed God telling them to start a Bible study for the kids in their building.

After much prayer, they decided to invite the kids to their apartment for a Sunday evening study. They ordered four Bibles in case any kids came. That Sunday, seven kids showed up at Vance's apartment—led by the 16-year-old owner of a new pair of shoes. The following week they ordered more Bibles, and 14 kids showed up!

Who would have thought the kingdom of God would come to the kids of an apartment complex just because one man chose to give away a new pair of shoes?

For the next two months we will be discussing another discipline of the Christian – witnessing.

It will bookend our missions conference, our theme being **"the fields are white unto harvest."**

There is an apple picker's parable that says, **"Our God of Grace often gives us a second chance, but there is no second chance to harvest a ripe crop."**

We refer to the gospel as good news because that's what it means, but Carl Henry says that **"the gospel is only good news if it gets there in time."**

We are going to look first at our commission found in **Matthew 28:18-20**. This is where we get our marching orders.

Hudson Taylor, missionary to China who founded the China Inland Mission now called OMF or Overseas Missionary Fellowship, once said: **"The great commission is not an option to be considered. It is a command to be obeyed."**

Here are some sobering statistics.

95% of all Christians have never won a soul to Christ.

80% of all Christians do not consistently witness for Christ.

Less than 2% are involved in the ministry of evangelism.

In research that the Barna Group did, they found that Christians are not evangelizing as often as they used to. In a 1993 survey it was found that 89% of Christians who shared their faith agreed that it was the responsibility of every Christian. Today the percentage of people who say it is the responsibility of Christians is 64%, yet they find that few do.

What has also changed is the approach to evangelism. 70% say they ask about a person's faith and life experiences, but then share their faith by how they live rather than speaking about it. In other words, be visible, not verbal. This is called lifestyle evangelism, establishing relationships with others in the hopes that how you live will lead people to Christ. They also admit that they are less likely to avoid spiritual conversation if their non-Christian friend would reject them. They would rather not risk their friendship by offending them with the gospel.

They admit their reluctance to share the gospel is fueled in part by the belief that their non-Christian friends aren't interested in hearing about Christ.

But Barna's research did reveal some positive results. The percentage of millennials sharing their faith has increased. Their study indicated that 65% of millennials have shared the gospel in the past year. While the millennial generation has been characterized as being religiously indifferent, those who are Christians are engaging in evangelism. So while there are proportionally fewer evangelical Christians among the millennial generation, they remain committed and motivated to share their faith with their peers. While this should be encouraging, a matter of concern is the decline among other older generations in sharing the gospel. As I noted, many boomers and busters believe they have that responsibility but less than half actually do.

We could spend our whole time this morning looking at statistics and not get to our text. When it comes to the great commission, Hudson Taylor said, "God isn't looking for people with great faith, but for individuals ready to follow Him."

Keith Green, who was one of the early voices among Contemporary Christian Music said, "This generation of Christians is responsible for this generation of souls on the earth."

So what is the commission we have been given?

The dictionary defines commission as authorization to perform certain duties or to take on certain powers; the authority to act on behalf of another.

In our text, Jesus is the one commissioning His disciples. This commission extends to all disciples throughout each generation. In His commissioning we see His Power, His Plan, and His Presence. We need to understand each if we are to implement the task given to us.

I. HIS POWER – v. 18

Some translations use the word "power", while others use the word **authority**. We normally think of power as strength either in regard to mechanical or physical. It can be energy that is explosive.

Some baseball or football players have been described as having power.

We talk about the explosive power a weightlifter needs when he grabs the bar of weights off the floor and hoists it over his head while standing up from a squatting position.

That kind of power is from the Greek word *dunamos* from which we get the word dynamite.

But that kind of power isn't what Jesus is talking about here. **Authority** is a better translation and refers to an official right. In this case it is delegated authority that has been given with the right to use it. The same word is used in **John 1:12** where we are given the power, the authority, the right to become the children of God.

Our text says this authority was given to Jesus. Scripture, both prophetically stated in the Old Testament and factually seen in the New Testament proclaims that Jesus is seated at the right hand of the Father, which is a place of authority.

Psalms 110:1 (Messianic psalm) "The Lord says to my Lord: 'Sit at my right hand until I make Your enemies a footstool to Your feet.'"

In a prophetic vision, Daniel speaks about the authority given to the Messiah.

Daniel 7:13-14 "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 worshiped Him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that will not pass away, and His kingdom is one that will never be destroyed."

In **Acts 7:56** as Stephen was being stoned, he stated that he saw Jesus standing at the right hand of God. That position is the highest position given, one of honor and authority. Jesus said this authority had been given to Him, and in our passage, He was giving the same authority to His disciples.

Jesus's authority is established in two places.

First, Jesus says He has all authority in heaven.

A. Jesus Has All Authority in Heaven

Let me make something abundantly clear. This authority or right is absolute meaning that it is perfect, complete, unmixed. His authority can never be overthrown.

It is unlimited reaching to every person and domain. It is unlimited in time and scope and place.

There is no place that His authority is any less than in some other place.

There is no time that His authority is any less than at some other time.

There is no person or kingdom that His authority is any less than over some other person or kingdom.

His authority is absolute and is over all.

He has ALL authority, absolute authority in heaven.

This authority extends to all unfallen angels, all thrones and dominions – from the highest to the lowest, they all bow to Him.

This authority extends to all fallen angels and demons who are rulers of this world's darkness, wicked spirits in high places and includes Satan himself.

John Phillips describes the authority Jesus has over these demonic beings like this: **“Whether they are overruling the affairs of nations or empires, disseminating Satanic creeds, tormenting children, inciting men to war, spreading famine and woe, inciting people to lust, binding youth with drugs, blinding adults with delusions, hindering God’s work, or sowing tares among the wheat, at length they are curbed by the Lord. They gnash their teeth in rage, but they bow before the authority and power of the One who says to them, ‘Thus far, and no farther.’”**

That is the authority He wields in heaven. But Jesus also has all authority on the earth.

B. Jesus Has All Authority on Earth

During His ministry years, Jesus exercised authority in a variety of ways.

John 3:35 “The Father loves the Son and has

placed everything in His hand.”

He demonstrated authority over diseases and deformities (**Matthew 4:23**).

He demonstrated authority over demons and the Satan (**Matthew 4:10, 24; 8:30-32; 12:22; Revelation 19:20; 20:10**).

He demonstrated authority over sin (**Matthew 9:6**).

He demonstrated authority over death (**Mark 5:41-42; Luke 7:12; John 11:43-44**).

He demonstrated authority over His own life to lay it down in death and take it up again (**John 10:18**).

All authority has been given to Jesus on earth and we see from **Philippians 2:9-11** that one day EVERY knee will bow in heaven and on earth and under the earth because He has been exalted to the highest place and given a name that is above every name so that every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the father.

Nothing in heaven or on earth is outside the realm of His authority.

That He has been given all authority and that authority has been given to us to carry out the assignment we are commissioned to complete, should eliminate fear wherever and to whomever He sends us.

John Phillips describes it this way regarding the authority that has been given to us by Jesus: We have **“all the right of absolute authority and all the resources of absolute power.”**

That’s why Peter and John standing before the Sanhedrin could boldly assert in **Acts 4:21** when they were told to keep silent about Jesus that they could not help but speak about what they had seen and heard regarding Jesus. He was their authority. We read earlier in the chapter that Peter was filled with the Holy Spirit when he spoke, and the Sanhedrin took note that they had been with Jesus (**vv. 8, 13**).

Where does such boldness come from?

It comes from the authority given to them at their commissioning.

It comes from the power given to them through the indwelling/empowering/enabling Spirit to boldly proclaim the gospel. The word power in **Acts 1:8** is the strength, ability, boldness to speak for Christ. And just so you know, we will be looking at that passage next week when we consider our capability in sharing the gospel.

Jesus was given ALL power or authority in heaven and on earth and He commissioned us with that authority to go in His name to share the gospel. Next, we see His plan.

II. HIS PLAN – vv. 19-20a

The plan Jesus laid out was for a rag tag group to take the gospel. They were as unlikely a bunch of men to carry out His plan as any. They were often contentious, self-centered and doubting, yet the plan of the Master was to galvanize them into a formidable force that would take the gospel to a religious but pagan world.

The word “**therefore**” links **verse 18** and **verses 19-20**, between His authority and our commission.

Someone has rightly said that there is no higher authority nor greater commission.

Notice the people who will carry out His plan.

A. The People For His Plan

The people involved in carrying out this commission have been identified for us in **verses 16-17**: “**Then the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had told them to go. When they saw Him, they worshiped Him; but some doubted.**”

While Jesus is speaking to the disciples, it is inferred that every believer is commissioned with this task. If we are saved, this commission is as much for us as it is for the 11 disciples who met Jesus and heard these words. It’s as if they echo through time and penetrate our own ears.

It isn’t just for those who have the spiritual gift of

evangelism.

It isn’t just for those who have a calling by the Lord to go to some distant land or unreached people group to learn a language or decipher a language and put it into writing, eventually translating the gospel so they can hear the good news. Every believer is a part of His plan to reach the world.

You may remember me telling Mike and Hannah Carney several years ago at a baby dedication that they were missionaries responsible in sharing the gospel with their children. This passage is as much a plan that parents share the good news with their children as it is a preacher or missionary sharing the good news from the pulpit or in the jungle.

But the choice is up to us whether we will heed the call, obey the commission, take the responsibility.

Isobel Kuhn who was a missionary to China and Thailand said: “**I believe that in each generation God has called enough men and women to evangelize all the yet unreached tribes of the earth. It is not God who does not call. It is man who will not respond!**”

John Piper is more direct: “**Go, send, or disobey.**”

I think most of us want to be courageous and contagious sharers of the gospel but we either lack courage or conviction. We doubt we have the right tools or we’re content with our own salvation alone. **What if they ask us a question we can’t answer? What if they reject us or worse, make fun of us?**

We can come up with any number of excuses as to why we want to leave it to someone else.

I don’t know what to say.

I don’t think they want to hear.

I don’t have the time.

I am not a gifted speaker.

Send someone else.

We are the people in His plan to share the gospel. Jesus then tells us about the places in His plan.

B. The Places In His Plan

It’s very clear where the gospel is to go. It’s to be

spread to all nations and to all people.

In the early part of His earthly ministry as Jesus sent out the disciples, He told them only to go to the people of Israel. They were to be the first recipients of the gospel. But here He states that every nation is to be reached. No nation was to be excluded. No people groups were to be avoided.

Taking a peek into the future through the lens of John's prophetic book Revelation, we see the success of the spread of the gospel and the fulfillment of His plan.

Revelation 7:9-10 "After this I looked and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb. They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands. And they cried out in a loud voice: 'Salvation belongs to our God, who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb.'"

Where are the places we are to go in our world?

Our world includes our family, both immediate and extended.

Our world includes those with whom we have frequent contact like our neighbors and coworkers and classmates.

Our world includes those we have as casual acquaintances like the mailman, the pharmacist, a doctor or the person who does our taxes.

Our world includes the nations as we pray for missionaries who have contact with people we do not. Sometimes they mention people by name. Other times they mention only to pray for someone they are building relationships with.

Our world can include the use of technology as we may share the gospel through email or social media or some blog.

Groups like the Jesus Film use mobile devices as they share the gospel through film and flash drives.

With the advancements of technology, it is true that the world is shrinking. The world is at our doorstep and Jesus' plan was for us to take the gospel to the ends of the earth, to all corners of the globe, to

every nation, tribe, people and language.

A couple days ago Pastor Jim sent me a note from the European regional director for CEF talking about Hope for Ukraine. Let me read it as a challenge for us to consider our world where we live and where we take the gospel.

"We are praying much at this time about opportunities for ministry in the next weeks and months – especially coming up to Christmas time. Iulian shared with the CEF team in Romania today to plan as if this Christmas was the last Christmas. How would we do things differently? How many more training events would be held, how many villages would be evangelized, if this really was the last Christmas?"

It speaks to the urgency of sharing the gospel in the places and to the people we are called to go as ambassadors of Christ. Let me encourage you to make a list of people that you can begin to pray about in sharing the gospel. **What if you never got another chance to talk with them?**

His plan goes beyond just noting the people and places. It also includes the purpose for His plan.

C. The Purpose For His Plan

To each of us the imperative rings loudly – make disciples. In His instructions, Jesus gives three participles as part of the command to make disciples. A participle functions both as a verb and an adjective. It describes an action to be taken.

1. Our purpose is to go

It literally means having gone or in your going. It assumes that by the very nature of the command we are obeying Jesus by going.

We have contented ourselves with hoping they will come to us. Churches have dedicated themselves to providing an environment that makes them feel at home and welcome while they hear bits and pieces of the gospel. They have removed things that might be offensive to an unbeliever. But this injunction by the Lord tells us to go, to go to where those who need the gospel live. We can't wait for them to come to us. We as the people of Christ are to go.

2. Our purpose is to baptize

When we have made disciples, people who have committed themselves to follow Jesus through faith for salvation, they are to be baptized. Now, to be clear, baptism is not a requirement for salvation. Verses like **John 3:16** and **Ephesians 2:8-9** make it clear that salvation is a gift of God so that when we believe by faith we are saved by His grace alone and by nothing else that we might add to it like being baptized. Baptism is an external expression of an internal transformation symbolizing that we have died and been buried with Christ but raised to new life. Baptism is then an act of obedience that shows others we are saved.

3. Our purpose is to teach

The third participle that explains our action in making disciples is to teach these new believers what it means to walk in newness of life or in other words, teach them how to be godly. The things Jesus taught the disciples are the things they were to pass on. That's what it means to make disciples.

We are the people in His plan involved in going to our world for the purpose of making disciples. That involves our going, baptizing, and teaching.

Jesus has one more important truth regarding this commission. We have seen His power and His plan, both important in helping us understand the authority in which we go and in the plan He has to carry out the commission. What He says next is important in our carrying it out. It's His presence.

III. HIS PRESENCE – v. 20b

A. We See Its Fact

“Surely I am with you.”

The KJV uses the word **“lo”** signifying that something important is going to be said, so pay close attention, it's worth remembering.

The NIV uses the word **“surely”** which could read certainly. It is the promise of the Lord that He will be with us.

It is the same I Am who told Moses when he asked who he should say sent him if the Israelites should ask. God said **“I Am has sent you.”**

The **“I am”** is emphatic and calls attention to His presence. It is a fact that Jesus is with us in the process of our making disciples. That should give us incredible confidence and assurance.

Secondly, we see its frequency.

B. We See Its Frequency

The frequency is in found in a single word – **“always”**. He is Emmanuel – God with us.

It's not maybe I will be with you.

It's not sometimes I will be with you.

He empathically states that He will be with you always. It's a word that means at all times, on all occasions, continuously, without exception. That is the length and breadth and width and height of His presence. Where He sends us, He is with us. The ship was breaking up, but Paul told all the people on board that they would make it because an angel told him he would testify of his faith in Rome.

And now to our closing point, we see its future.

C. We See Its Future

“Even to the end of the age.”

What that means is that this commission is ongoing. The only end date for it is when Jesus returns, so until then we have a job to do, a commission to carry out, a purpose to fulfill. We are Jesus's plan to share the gospel with the world. Every believer is to be in the game contributing in some way to the success of sharing the gospel to the whole world.

John Stott wrote: **“We must be global Christians with a global mission because our God is a global God.”**

We don't go on our own authority, we go on the authority of Jesus. We don't face the task alone because He is with us. That should give us both boldness and confidence to accept His commission. We make disciples in the power and with the presence of Christ Himself.