

The Great Commission

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Preacher: Shawn Woo

[0:00] And please open up your Bibles to Matthew chapter 28, verses 16 to 20. Matthew chapter 28, verses 16 to 20.

Let me pray for the reading and preaching of God's word.

Heavenly Father, whether we have a building or not, rain or shine, we have gathered in your name to honor you, to worship you, to be taught from your word, that we might be your faithful disciples for as long as we are here on earth, making disciples of all nations.

So, Lord, please speak to us, address us by the power of your Holy Spirit in your word.

Lord, reveal to us the wondrous things in your word and conform us to it, shape us with it, all for the glory of your name.

[1:54] In Jesus' name we pray. Amen. If you are able, please stand. Let's honor God together as we read from the word.

Matthew 28, verses 16 to 20. Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them.

And when they saw him, they worshipped him. But some doubted. And Jesus came and said to them, 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. This is God's holy and authoritative word. Please be seated. We're not doing anything special to celebrate this this year, but it is our 11th anniversary since our church's founding.

And it's as good a Sunday as any to ask ourselves, why do we exist as a local church? What's our reason for being?

[3:09] What's our purpose? What's our mission? Do we exist to be a force for good in our society, in our city, in our neighborhood? Do we exist to create a loving community of Christians in Cambridge where we can all belong together?

Why do we exist? In our passage this morning, Jesus answers that question. The Great Commission, as it has come to be known, is found in its essential form in all four Gospels and in the Book of Acts.

It's a climactic command that Jesus issues to all his followers shortly before his ascension. And because these are his last words, his parting words, and because they succinctly summarize all of the Gospels and the direction and the directive of the four Gospels, many have called this the marching orders of the church.

And so my main point this morning is simple. Make disciples of Jesus Christ. If I could expand that a little bit, I could say that the universal authority of Jesus enables us to make disciples of Jesus, make disciples of Jesus among all the nations.

I'm going to talk first about all authority that Jesus says that he has, and then about all nations, and then all commands, and then all the days that Jesus commands us to do this.

[4:28] Mary Magdalene and Mary, the mother of James and Joseph, have informed Jesus' 11 remaining disciples that the risen Jesus will meet them in Galilee. So it says in verse 16 that now the 11 disciples went to Galilee to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them.

Apparently, either they were in the habit of meeting Jesus in this mountain in Galilee, or Jesus had specifically instructed them to meet him at this mountain. They know where to go, and they're expecting to meet the risen Jesus.

And they're not disappointed. It says in verse 17, And when they saw him, they worshipped him, but some doubted. Since verse 18 tells us that Jesus came to them, it seems that the disciples spotted

Jesus from a distance away, and out of awe, and they started to worship him immediately, and Jesus then comes near them, approaches them.

And so when they're worshipping him and falling before him like this, they're recognizing that Jesus is not merely human. He's divine. They're bowing before him, prostrating themselves in worship, in acknowledgement of his supreme worth and glory.

But they are not entirely without doubts. It says that some doubted. And the word translated doubt here also means to hesitate.

[5:50] It's the same word that was used in chapter 14 when Peter stepped out in faith to walk on water toward Jesus. And he had faith to do that. But as soon as he started seeing the winds and the stirring up of the waves, he says that he doubted.

Jesus says to him, Oh, you of little faith, why did you doubt? So the disciples worshipped Jesus after seeing the risen Lord, but some doubted. Some of them were afraid.

Some of them were doubtful. They had little faith. Sure, there was excitement, anticipation, but there was also hesitation. Can this really be Jesus?

Did he really rise from the dead? Is he really the son of God who has taken on human flesh? It's remarkable that their doubt is mentioned here at all.

If you are writing a book to convince people that Jesus is the Christ, the son of God, who is risen from the dead, which is the gospel of Matthew, would you include a statement saying that his disciples, his own disciples that have been with him all along, doubted after his resurrection?

[6:57] Probably not. But Matthew includes it here because it's true. It's what happened. Though they should have had more faith, some of them doubted, and that fact in turn encourages us, those of us who sometimes doubt.

Do you ever wrestle with doubts and questions that you have no answer to? Jude 1.22 commands us, have mercy on those who doubt.

We are commanded to do precisely what Jesus does for his disciples in this passage. When Jesus saw how some of his disciples doubted, he didn't condemn them out of exasperation.

How can you still doubt me after all that you've seen? Calming of the storms, defeating of the 5,000, now rising from the dead, and you still doubt me. Away from me, you faithless generation.

He could have said that, but he didn't say that. Instead, he showed them mercy. A bruised reed he will not break, and a smoldering wick he will not quench.

[8:03] Some of the disciples doubted, but still they heeded the message of Mary, and Mary, they still showed up on the mountain in Galilee, didn't they? Yes, some of you doubt, but aren't you still here this Sunday morning to worship God?

Aren't you still listening to and believing the message of the gospel? Do not be disheartened by your doubts. Continue in your faith, seeking understanding, and persevere in faith and obedience, knowing that Jesus, our Lord, is merciful.

It seems that the combination of fear and awe is what kept them away, but Jesus approaches them, and imagine this scene as Jesus steps toward them and draws near to them and makes this pronouncement.

This is the first time they're seeing the risen Lord. It says, We see four phrases with the adjective all in these verses, indicating the comprehensiveness of this great commission.

All authority, all nations, all commands, and all ways, or more literally, all the days. This is a fulfillment of the prophecy of Daniel 7, 13-14.

[9:28] Remember, Jesus most often refers to himself in the gospels as the son of man, and that prophecy in Daniel 7 says, The son of man approaches the ancient of days, the Lord God, and he's given all authority and glory and dominion and power so that all peoples and nations and languages should serve him.

So all authority, all nations, and he says his dominion is an everlasting dominion which shall not pass away, and his kingdom, one that shall not be destroyed. In other words, all ways, all the days. This is the fulfillment of the prophecy of Daniel 7. All authority, all nations, all commands, all the days. First, we see the universal authority of Jesus in verse 18.

All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. If you remember in chapter 4 when Satan came to Jesus to tempt him, he showed him, he took him to a mountain, a high mountain, showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory, and he offered it to Jesus.

He said, All these I will give you if you will fall down and worship me. And Jesus rebuffed him and then, and it said, Be gone, Satan, for it is written, you shall worship the Lord your God and him alone shall you serve.

[10:42] Now, having obeyed God the Father and having fulfilled his mission to seek and save the lost by giving his life on the cross as a ransom for many, Jesus once again stands upon a mountain. But this time, it's not Satan who offers him authority, it's the Father who has given him authority.

And this time, it's not authority on earth only, it's authority on heaven and earth because Jesus has been faithful and Jesus has obeyed and humbled himself before his Father.

Governor Mara Healy of Massachusetts has the legal authority to grant pardons to state criminals, but she cannot pardon federal criminals because she doesn't have that authority.

It's beyond her jurisdiction. President Donald Trump could not fly the U.S. aircraft through France and into France airspace during recent military operations because the government of France didn't give him permission because he doesn't have authority, jurisdiction in France.

He only has authority within the United States of America. But Jesus Christ has no such limitations. He has all authority in heaven and on earth.

[11:57] Whether it's in the U.S. or the U.K., Russia or China, Iran or Pakistan or Nigeria or Sudan or Cuba or Venezuela, wherever you go, Jesus is king and he has all authority.

Whether you live in a red state or a blue state, whatever school you go to, whatever company you work for, Jesus is king and he has all authority in heaven and on earth.

Are there disobedient rebel forces at work throughout the world? Yes, of course. But that doesn't change the fact, the reality that Jesus is king overall and that all authority in heaven and on earth belongs to him.

Jesus is seated at the right hand of God in the heavenly places far above all rule and authority and power and dominion and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come.

From the archangel Michael to Satan himself, no angel or demon can thwart the progress, the fulfillment of this great commission because Jesus has all authority in heaven and on earth.

[13:03] All proper divinely appointed authorities in the world, fathers, elders, governors, kings, their authority is all derivative. They derive their authority from God and have no authority in and of themselves.

The claim that Jesus has upon our lives trumps all and this is why you cannot wall in Jesus or compartmentalize the authority of Christ.

Jesus has authority here in the gathered church in the Trinity Cambridge Church. I'll speak of him here when we are gathered but I will not speak of him to my neighbors. Jesus has authority here in the U.S.

where we have freedom of religion but in these countries where converting to Christianity is outlawed where I'll be persecuted for my faith, well there that's outside of the purview of Jesus' authority.

No it's not. Jesus' authority cannot be contained. It overcomes and overrules every limit and boundary that we placed upon it for all authority in heaven and on earth has been given to him.

[14:08] God the Father has highly exalted Jesus and given him the name that is above every name so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father.

God has put all things in subjection under Jesus so that in the end when the Son gladly submits and subjects himself to the Father all glory redounds to him so that God may be all in all.

Are you aggrieved by the fact that there are rebels who defy the lordship of Christ in our city and throughout the world? Does it make you indignant that as the gospel goes forth in the world and as King Jesus rises forth in the power of his spirit that there are people who do not bow their heads before the king?

That's our job. Heralds, witnesses as disciples of Jesus to go and tell them what are you doing? Why aren't you bowing the knee before the king?

Do you not know he is the Christ the risen king the son of the living God? Have you not hurt? And the fact that Jesus has all authority is the basis and the warrant for the great commission to go and make disciples of all nations.

[15:24] Look at verse 19. It says, go therefore and make disciples of all nations. Jesus has all authority. Therefore, go and make disciples of all nations.

If Jesus were a local governor or a provincial ruler, we will not have to make disciples of all nations. But because he is the king of kings and lord of lords who has all authority in heaven and on earth, we must make disciples of all nations.

There's a notable contrast between Matthew 28, 19 and Matthew 10, verse 5. In Matthew 10, verse 5, prior to his death and resurrection, Jesus sent his disciples out with this instruction.

Go nowhere among the Gentiles and enter no town of the Samaritans, but go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel and proclaim as you go, saying the kingdom of heaven is at hand. That word Gentiles there in Matthew 10 is a different translation of the same Greek word that's translated in 28, 19 as nations. So then in chapter 10, Jesus said, don't go to the nations.

[16:33] But in chapter 28, he says, go to all the nations. Why the sudden turnaround? As Jesus said in John 12, 32, it's when Jesus is lifted up from the earth in his death on the cross that he draws all the nations, all peoples to himself.

It's at the cross that Jesus disarmed the rulers and the authorities and put them to open shame by triumphing over them. It's at the cross that Jesus broke down the dividing wall of hostility in his flesh between Jews and Gentiles by fulfilling the law.

It's only after his death and resurrection that we can proclaim the good news of salvation to Gentiles, to all nations. This is why Jesus said in John 4, 22, that salvation is from the Jews.

And Paul echoes that in Romans 1, 16. The gospel is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. The Lord spoke to his messianic king in Psalm 2, 8, Ask of me and I will make the nations your heritage and the ends of the earth your possession. And that's precisely what God has done for Jesus in raising him from the dead. The salvation is from the Jews, but it is no longer exclusively for the Jews. God's plan all along was for salvation to go to all the nations from the Jews as he had promised to Abram in Genesis chapter 12.

[17:58] This mission that God calls us to, that God involves us in, is not a small thing. It is grand, it is glorious, and it is cosmic in scope.

So let us make it our ambition to preach the gospel where Christ has not already been named. There are tribes and languages, peoples, and nations who have not heard the name of Jesus Christ.

How can they bow the knee to a king that they have not heard of? There are rebel forces defying the lordship of Jesus all throughout the world, so let us go and share Christ and his gospel with them so that they pledge allegiance to our gracious king.

We pray for 12 foreign countries throughout the calendar year, one per month. Algeria, Bangladesh, China, India, Indonesia, Iran, Japan, Myanmar, Nigeria, Pakistan, Thailand, because we have gospel partners there who are working there that we support, and or because there are many peoples in those countries among whom Christ has not already been named.

Can we one day as a church, as a local church, send missionary teams out to each of those countries to make disciples and plant churches? Can we pray and serve and give and teach toward that end?

[19:17] Can we one day as a church plant churches in Albany, Schenectady, Troy, New York, Springfield, Holyoke, Massachusetts, Burlington, Vermont, Portland, Auburn, Maine, Hartford, New Haven, Connecticut?

Some of the least church and most unbelieving cities in this entire country are all here in the northeast within striking distance of our church. Are we not here in the capital of New England, the least Christian region in our country?

Are we not here in Cambridge, the Jerusalem of higher education throughout the world where people from every tribe and language and nation come to study and work? Are we not here for such a time as this?

Pray that God would send more labors into these ripe harvest fields, that God would raise up labors from our very own midst, that we would have the resources and the resolve and the resilience to sacrifice and to send and to make disciples among all nations.

I also want you to know that it's not only those who pick up and leave town to be a missionary or to plant churches, that they're not the only ones who are obeying the Great Commission.

[20 : 34] The first word of verse 19 is go. It's translated in the ESV as an imperative, but it is not an imperative. It's a participle in the original Greek, like the word baptizing and teaching.

As you go, therefore, or going, therefore, 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.

All three participles, going, baptizing, teaching, they all modify the imperative, make disciples.

That's the single command. That's the main command.

Make disciples. And going and baptizing and teaching are how you do that. And that means wherever you are, wherever you are going, right now, you should be making disciples.

When we read the book of Acts, we see that it's not only those who travel to other places with the express purpose of proclaiming the gospel who make disciples. There are people like that, Philip and Paul and Barnabas and Apollos.

[21 : 35] But there are also people like those who are mentioned in Acts 8, 1-4, those who are scattered throughout the region of Samaria and Judea because of a great persecution that broke out against the church in Jerusalem.

They had no intention of leaving Jerusalem. They were scattered by circumstances beyond their control. They were scattered by great persecution. And yet, wherever they went, they spread the gospel.

Wherever you are scattered, it is our job, it is our mission to scatter the seeds of the gospel. Maybe, maybe some of you are scattered here because of school or a program that you got into or work that you found or relationship that you got into or maybe you'll be scattered further from here to other places.

But wherever you are going, therefore, make disciples of Jesus Christ. It's not only the apostles who receive the Holy Spirit. All of God's people receive the Holy Spirit to be empowered to go and make disciples.

And if you're here in Boston right now, start here. Moving across the ocean or changing zip codes does not automatically make one a missionary. If you are not sharing the gospel here with anybody, you will not share it when you change your zip code.

[22 : 53] So start here. Start making disciples. Making disciples also involves baptizing. If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.

If you are to be saved, you must have an inward faith in the risen Lord, but you also must confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord. There must be an outward profession. And baptism is the sacrament that Jesus has commanded for us to observe as an outward profession of that inward faith.

And baptism presupposes the context of the church since individual believers are all baptized into one body. When you're baptized, you're baptized into the church, into the body of Christ as it says in 1 Corinthians 12, 13.

No one can baptize him or herself. It's the gathered body of Christ that baptizes new converts into Christ and into their body. And baptism entails repentance of sin and renunciation of self.

Acts 22, 16 says, rise and be baptized and wash away your sins, calling on the name of Jesus.

Romans 6, 3 says that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus have been baptized into his death so that we might die to our former selves and walk in the newness of life.

[24 : 14] That's why we are baptized in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Notice that the word name there is singular. It doesn't say the names of the Father, Son, and Spirit but the singular name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit which is a startling assertion of the divinity of Christ.

The Lord God of the Old Testament, Yahweh, who created the world and who split the Red Sea and delivered Israel from Egypt is the same Lord God because Jesus is the second person of the Trinity, the Son of the living God.

So he has the name of the Father and the Son and the Spirit and that's why in the book of Acts people often, the church often baptizes people in the name of Jesus because to baptize people in the name of Jesus is to baptize them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit.

There's one name that is above every other name and why is the name of God significant?

Because a name is personal. A name represents someone, it stands for someone.

A name brings us into covenant relationship with God. I read a news story of the Rohingya refugee family from Myanmar. As a refugee, at first, they had no recognized legal identity because they didn't have any identification papers.

[25 : 36] They had no official status. They couldn't get a driver's license. They couldn't even open a bank account in their name. But after getting resettled in the U.S., they broke down in tears when they first received their official documents naming them and recognizing their name.

And the father of the family, speaking on behalf of the other Rohingya people as well, said to an interviewer, for the first time in 100 years, we can say, we have a land, we have a home, we have a name.

We take our names for granted, but having a name is no small thing. When a wife takes on her husband's surname and declares, I am one flesh with him, it's not insignificant.

When an adopted child takes on the family name and declares, I am now a member of this family, it's not insignificant. So likewise, a convert to Christianity is baptized in the name of the Father and of the Son and the Holy Spirit.

They take on a new name, a new identity, and they belong to a new family. Baptism is the Christians planting his or her flag in the ground. Why do armies carry a cumbersome flag into battle?

[26 : 51] It's not merely for visual communication to provide a rallying point. It's a point of pride and identity. It's about morale and honor. So a Christian declares his allegiance by getting baptized in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

I pledge my allegiance to a new king. I renounce all other lords and I belong to Jesus Christ. If you're a part of the king's army, you have to play, you have to fly the king's flag.

I've heard Pastor Alistair Begg say once, there is no such thing as a secret disciple. Either the secrecy will kill the discipleship or the discipleship will kill the secrecy.

Making disciples involves going and making disciples involves baptizing people from all nations joining the one kingdom under the lordship of Jesus Christ.

Jesus continues in verse 20, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. All authority, all nations, all commands. Making disciples involves teaching.

[27 : 56] Why? Because the very word disciple in Greek means learner, a student, an apprentice. Jesus is telling his 11 disciples to make disciples and that means Jesus is saying to them, replicate yourselves.

You are my disciples. Now go and make disciples. Replicate yourselves. Bring others to follow me and learn from me the way you have done up to this point. This is why discipling doesn't have to be overly complicated.

If you are a Christian, by definition, you understand the gospel and that means you can share the gospel with non-Christians. You don't need a seminary degree for that and you can invite non-Christians or Christians who are younger in the faith than you to do a Bible study with you.

Start small. Start with one book. We just went through the Gospel of Matthew. We're in the last passage of the Gospel of Matthew. You can go through the Gospel of Matthew with them. You go through the Sermon on the Mount maybe if you want to do a shorter study with them.

If you forgot what you learned well, very conveniently all the sermons are recorded and posted on our website. You could use it as a reference and as a resource. You open up the Word together.

[29 : 10] You teach them what you're learning from God. What you've learned in church. And then pray with them. You open up your heart to them. Show them how you are following Christ in your life.

Be an example for them. That's how you make disciples of Jesus Christ. And remember that you are not making disciples of yourselves. You are making disciples of Jesus Christ.

You are not making disciples of Sean Wu or Ed Kang either. You are making disciples of Jesus Christ. They are to observe all that Jesus has commanded them.

If you are not learning and obeying the commandments of the Lord Jesus, you are not a disciple of Christ. In John 8, 31, Jesus said to the Jews who had believed him, he says, if you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples and you will know the truth and the truth will set you free.

Apparently, some of these Jews who had believed in Jesus are not truly his disciples. Why not? Because they do not yet abide in or remain in or hold on to his word.

[30:22] They are not observing all that he has commanded them. Whoever does not bear his own cross and come after me cannot be my disciple, Jesus said in Luke 14, 27.

And Jesus doesn't say teach them to observe some of what I have commanded. No, he says obey all that I have commanded you. We don't get to pick and choose.

We're so used to laws that we can keep selectively but God's commands are not like those human laws. And these are divine commands not mere suggestions.

Sometimes I see Christians act like biblical commands are mere suggestions that you only need to follow when it's convenient for yourself. And their behavior proves that they do not truly submit to the lordship of Christ.

They're still trying to be their own lords. You might say that you believe in Jesus but if you are not abiding in his word and if you are living in willful disobedience to his commands then you are not his disciple.

[31:24] God is not looking for mere one time converts. He's looking for lifelong mature disciples. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and love your neighbor as yourself.

Do unto others what you would have them do to you. Rejoice and give thanks. These are all commands that we must obey. These are all important commands frequently repeated in scriptures but we also must not confuse this with the great commission.

We must not lose our focus on our mission. These commands are the things that we must teach the disciples to observe and obey but that's not the great commission.

That's not the mission. Our mission is to make disciples who obey all these commands. Maybe you're taking care to obey these commands in your own life. But are you making disciples who are obeying these commands and teaching them to do the same?

If you are not making disciples then you are not obeying the great commission. This mission that Christ has given us has a narrow and specific focus. You start calling everything a mission then nothing becomes mission.

[32:36] We have a mission and that is to make disciples of Jesus Christ. And then he says my fourth and last point all the days in verse 20 teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you and behold I am with you always to the end of the age.

How do we know that this command was intended for all of Jesus' followers and not only for the twelve? Not only for the eleven that are here because Jesus is speaking to the eleven apostles here.

How do we know that? Because the scope of the command and what Jesus promises here goes beyond the lifetime of the original apostles. He says behold I am with you always to the end of the age.

The end of the age is not here. And Jesus said in John 17 he prayed for his disciples as you sent me into the world so I have sent them into the world and for their sake I consecrate myself that they also may be sanctified in truth.

I do not ask for these only but also for those who will believe in me through their word that they may all be one just as you Father are in me and I in you that they also may be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me.

[33:51] Jesus sent out his disciples but he's not sending them only. He prays not only for them but also for all those who will believe in him through their word.

All the subsequent following generations of Christians we are all sent out with the same task the great commission and that promise still stands. It's not so much a promise as it is a reality and a fact.

Jesus says I am with you to the very end of the age. I am with you always to the end of the age. When you share the gospel with your neighbors when you are persecuted reviled and ridiculed and imprisoned for his name's sake Jesus says I am with you always to the end of the age and is that authority the bookends the authority all authority that Jesus has and the promise that he will be with us all the days that helps us the weak and frail we are like the disciples who doubted to still go and share the good news of Jesus Christ with all the nations.

Let's pray that God would help us to do that. Father empower us with your spirit embolden us to share the good news of Jesus Christ show us teach us how to make disciples all around us that King Jesus may be recognized everywhere that from all tribes and peoples and nations and tongues Jesus name might be confessed that he might be worshipped and glorified Lord may our

discipling lead to your worship among all the nations in Jesus name we pray Amen