

“The Great Commission”

April 28, 2024

Matthew 28:16-20

I. Introduction

Matthew’s goal or objective in writing his Gospel was to prove that Jesus was the Messiah or the Christ, i.e., the One sent from God. Throughout his Gospel, Matthew demonstrated Jesus’ authority and power. In **Matthew 7:29** the crowds said that **“He taught as one who had authority, and not as their teachers of the law.”** Jesus taught with authority. In **Matthew 4:23-24** and in other instances, Matthew showed Jesus’ power over disease, sickness, and Satan as He healed the sick and cast out demons. In **Matthew 9:18-26** Matthew demonstrated Jesus’ power over death when He raised Jairus’s daughter back to life. As the Son of God, Jesus even had the power to forgive sin; for example, when Jesus healed the paralytic, He said in **Matthew 9:1-8**, **“Take heart, son, your sins are forgiven....Get up, take your mat and go home.”** Having demonstrated that Jesus is who He said He was, as he came to the end of his Gospel, Matthew recorded Jesus’ command that has come to be called “The Great Commission.”

The Great Commission was not the last thing that Jesus said while on the earth—**turn to Acts 1:1-12.** The “Great Commission” was given in Galilee. But Jesus final words and His ascension into heaven happened on the Mount of Olives just outside Jerusalem—some 90 miles south of Galilee. The Great Commission may not have been Jesus’ last words, but they are the last words that Matthew recorded because they are the primary purpose of every disciple or Christian and every church. So, let’s look at Matthew’s concluding verses beginning with the scene.

II. The Scene

A. At first, the scene would be chaos as the mass of men and women—followers of Jesus—gathered together. Before and after the resurrection, Jesus had said that He would meet His disciples in Galilee; e.g., during the Last Supper, Jesus said in **Matthew 26:31**, **“After I have risen, I will go ahead of you into Galilee.”** In **Matthew 28:10** Jesus told the women who had just seen the empty tomb, **“Do not be afraid. Go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee; there they will see me.”** Jesus planned this meeting of His followers—His disciples—for the purpose of commissioning them to reach the world. Matthew didn’t record when or

how the Lord specified the time or place in Galilee, but there they were on the particular mountain at the appropriate time.

The last recorded appearance of Jesus before this meeting in Galilee was in Jerusalem 8 days after the resurrection when Thomas saw the resurrected Jesus for the first time ([John 20:26](#)). The journey from Jerusalem to Galilee was about 90 miles and on foot that could take up to a week for some of Jesus' disciples. After arriving in Galilee, [John 21:1-19](#) records that some of the disciples had gone fishing and Jesus had met them on the beach. It was at that time that Jesus asked Peter 3 times about his love for Him. It would be some time after that that Jesus met with His followers on the mountain—perhaps 20-25 days after His resurrection.

By this time, the eleven Apostles had all seen Jesus several times and knew that He was alive. The fact that some of the people on the mountain in Galilee doubted Jesus' resurrection would seem to indicate that more than just the Eleven were there. This is why some Bible scholars equate this meeting on the mountain in Galilee with the appearance of the Lord to the “[more than 500 of the brothers at the same time](#)” that Paul wrote about in [1 Corinthians 15:6](#). Because the Great Commission applies to all of His church, Jesus would surely have wanted to give it to the largest possible group of His faithful followers—they would all be instrumental in spreading the “Good News.” Not only were most of Jesus' followers from Galilee, but the region was a safe distance from Jerusalem, where most of Jesus' enemies were. So, a mountain in Galilee was a good and safe place for Jesus to meet with the majority of His disciples.

The more than 500 disciples who gathered there must have come with a wide range of questions and doubts and fears. As they waited for Jesus, the noise of everyone trying to get his questions answered would have been chaotic. But because they were there—doubts and all—they met Jesus Christ and had their doubts and questions and fears relieved. Because they were there, they were commissioned. Because they were there, they received the Lord's promise of His being with them continually and having His power available to them. It all started because they answered Jesus' call to “Come, follow me.”

B. When Jesus appeared, the scene changed from one of **chaos to one of worship**. When they saw the risen Jesus on the hillside, the confusion and the destroyed dreams disappeared. Like Thomas had said

earlier, many were probably saying, “My Lord and my God!” (John 20:28). Matthew didn’t describe the doubts or tell who the doubters were, but as the Lord came closer and His familiar voice was heard, all uncertainty must have disappeared. Like Thomas had done earlier, now those who had doubted fell down and joined the others in worship. They were in the presence of the living God. From that point on, their focus would have been on Christ and Him only. As Paul said in Philippians 1:21, “For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain.”

III. The Great Commission

A. Jesus had been given all authority. Before Jesus gave the Great Commission, He established His ability or the right that He had to make this command. He said, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.” Throughout the Gospel of Matthew, the authority or power of Jesus Christ had been demonstrated. Now at the close of his Gospel, Matthew made it clear that Jesus had **ALL** authority. When Jesus humbled Himself and came to the earth, He laid aside the status and privileges of being God but now, as we read last week in Philippians 2:6-11, He was “exalted to the highest place.” Through His death and resurrection, Jesus defeated all enemies and was given all authority. Daniel saw this day, turn to Daniel 7:13-14. It’s because of this authority—this right to use power—that Jesus gave the plan—the command—for spreading the Gospel throughout the world.

B. Jesus’ Command: Make disciples of all nations In Greek—the language of the New Testament — the only command in the Great Commission is “make disciples of all nations;” the rest of the Great Commission describes the requirements for “making disciples.” It took a little while—years really—but eventually the early Christians came to understand that “all nations” included Gentiles as well as Jews—in one of the first New Testament books written, Galatians 3:28 says, “There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.”

But a disciple is more than a convert or a church member. A disciple of the New Testament times, like an apprentice, would attach himself to a teacher. He would live with him, and he would learn from him. But he didn’t learn by just watching and listening, he also learned by doing. This is what Jesus did in

Luke 10:1-16. First, Jesus taught His disciples and then He sent them out 2 by 2 to teach others. In other words, a disciple isn't someone who just believes or is simply a learner. A disciple is one who trusts in Jesus Christ and follows Him in living a life of learning and obedience (**John 8:31**), i.e., *doing* as well as *hearing*.

This was the point of the encounter of Jesus with the rich young ruler in Luke—**turn to Luke 18:18-25**. Although the young man was very moral, religious, generous, and admiring of Jesus, he refused to give up everything for Christ and submit to Him as Lord. He sincerely wanted eternal life but was unwilling to give up his own life and possessions and obey Jesus' command to **"come, follow Me."** A true Christian is a person who has accepted Jesus as his Savior and has submitted himself to Jesus as Lord of his life; including carrying out the Great Commission." Jesus then gave three requirements for making disciples.

1. Requirement #1: GO. The first requirement in making disciples is to **"Go."** The Greek word is really "going." Jesus said, *"While you are going, make disciples of all nations."* As a disciple of Jesus, it is understood that no matter where a person is, he or she should be a witness for Him. Everyone should be seeking to win others to Jesus as he goes about his daily activities. Every Christian, not just the pastor or the missionaries, is to go and tell others that Jesus saves. **Turn to Acts 11:19-21**. Wherever they went, Christians told others the Good News about the Lord Jesus—Christians today must do the same.

2. Requirement #2: Baptizing them. The 2nd requirement for making disciples is that of **"baptizing them."** The baptism of John the Baptist was immersion in the Jordan River and it symbolized repentance from sin and turning to God (**Matthew 3:6**). But just as He changed the Passover meal to the Lord's Table, Jesus redefined baptism so that it became an outward act of identification with Him through faith. It is a visible, public testimony that one belongs to Jesus Christ. Through immersion (which is what the word baptism means), baptism symbolizes burial and resurrection. **Romans 6:4** says, **"We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life."** Baptism isn't part of salvation, but it is part of Jesus' command of being a disciple. In **Mark 16:16** Jesus said, **"Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned."** Although Jesus said to be baptized, it is disbelief, not lack of baptism, that leads to condemnation.

Baptism is to be made “in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit.” Since these exact words weren’t used in the baptism of converts in the New Testament, this is not a ritual formula that **must** be used. This is just a statement of the union that believers have with the whole Godhead. In these words, Jesus places Himself on equal level with God the Father and with the Holy Spirit. He also emphasizes the unity of the Trinity by declaring that baptism should be done in Their one **name**, not in Their separate **names**. Together God the Father, God the Son and the Holy Spirit make up the Godhead—the Trinity.

3. Requirement #3: Teaching them. The 3rd requirement for making disciples of all nations is that of “teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.” As a disciple of Jesus Christ—as a Christian—one is to obey the Lord. Turn to John 14:23-24. The only way to be able to obey is to know what He requires. The only way to know what He requires is to study His Word. Studying, understanding, and obeying is the lifelong task of every true disciple. 2 Timothy 2:15 says, “Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a workman who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth.”

C. Jesus will give His power to His disciples. Jesus didn’t command the disciples without giving them the power to carry out His commission. “Surely,” that is without any doubt, He is with each person who calls Him Savior and Lord. Jesus isn’t only “where two or three come together in my name” (Matthew 18:20), He is present with each believer as they are scattered throughout the world. When Jesus ascended into heaven, the Holy Spirit was sent to live inside each Christian. As we read earlier in Acts 1:8 Jesus said, “You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you.” In 1 Corinthians 3:16 Paul wrote, “Don’t you know that you yourselves are God’s temple and that God’s Spirit lives in you?” Now each Christian has God’s power in him; now we can say along with Paul, “I can do everything through him who gives me strength” (Philippians 4:13). Or Romans 8:31 says, “If God is for us, who can be against us!”

This power from Jesus isn’t intermittent, it is always there. Since He is God, Jesus is eternal and omnipresent. Jesus is with every believer every day of his life. Jesus will always be with those who belong to Him, leading them and giving them power to carry out His Great Commission “to the very end of the age” when He will return to the world in all His majesty, glory, and power.

IV. Conclusion

The Great Commission wasn't given to just Jesus' disciples that day on the mountain in Galilee, it was also given to us—Jesus' present-day disciples. The primary purpose of a disciple—of Christ's church—is to make more disciples and then train them. In [2 Corinthians 5:20](#) Paul wrote, “We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making His appeal through us.” God put it a different way in [Ezekiel 33:7-9](#): “Son of man, I have made you a watchman for the house of Israel; so, hear the word I speak and give them warning from me. When I say to the wicked, 'O wicked man, you will surely die,' and you do not speak out to dissuade him from his ways, that wicked man will die for his sin, and I will hold you accountable for his blood. But if you do warn the wicked man to turn from his ways and he does not do so, he will die for his sin, but you will have saved yourself.”

What are you doing about this command of your Lord and Savior? He may not call you to sell all you have and go to some foreign land as a missionary. He may not call you to go into the ministry. But He does call you—everyone—to be available to be used by Him wherever you are, wherever He may send you. Beyond being available, He wants you to be obedient. He has given you talents and abilities and they are to be used to carry out His Commission. Are you ready to do what He commands even if it means you need to get rid of your own agenda? As you go about your daily activities, are you a witness in what you do as well as in what you say? [Romans 10:14](#) says, “How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them?” “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 you.”