

The Great Commission: Matthew 18:18-20

Introduction: The words of the great commission in today's passage come from the highest possible authority, Jesus Christ himself. Put simply, if the benefits of the incarnation, death and resurrection are to be received, people have to know about them and put their faith in him.

So, what are those benefits? They are unimaginably great; all our sins are forgiven. After we die we will spend eternity with Jesus in heaven. In this life we have the power and presence of the Holy Spirit to help us to live pleasingly before God and lead purposeful lives. That is the great news which Jesus wants the world to know about.

Or, as St Paul said in Romans 10:13ff, 'Whoever calls on the name of the Lord will be saved but how can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them?'

This great commission comes under three headings: the universal authority of Christ, the worldwide mission of his disciples and the abiding presence of Jesus.

The Universal Authority of Christ

In verse 18, Jesus said, 'All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me ...' Think about this, absolute power over the galaxies, over history, over the future, all are in his hands. [See also Colossians 1:15-17 and Hebrews 1: 1-3]. It follows that if he is the Lord of all things, everyone ought to know about him and have the opportunity to know him.

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Do we really believe that? We might believe it as an abstract truth and affirm it when we say the creeds but do we *actually* believe it? One thing seems certain; people won't talk about their faith if they don't believe that people need to hear about it.

We tend to forget that this statement about his authority expresses the basic plank of the Christian faith; *Jesus is Lord*. And even when we *do* remember, we often forget that it means that as his followers we must yield our lives to him and, Luke 6:46, 'do what he says.' Well, if he is the boss, what are his orders?

The Worldwide Mission of the Church

Jesus said, 'Go and make disciples of all Nations.' For many Christians this means that they go to other places as missionaries, but for most of us it means telling people we know or meet. Wherever we live, that is *our* world.

'Making disciples' is a process not a single event. People usually take time to think about saying 'yes' to God. It involves explaining to them what he means to us. Sometimes it is like planting a seed that others will reap. It usually means being part of a team (our church friends). It always means praying for people we care about that God will help them to understand.

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The word 'disciple' means a learner. Jesus says that in helping people to become his disciples means *teaching* them to observe all that he commanded them. That means we have to become learners ourselves. We do this by reading the Bible, joining a bible study, listening carefully to sermons and above all, learning how to explain our own story of what God has done for us.

All this can be scary and difficult. We all need help. Apart from our fellow church members (who are in the same boat as us), we have help from the very best source, Jesus himself.

The Abiding presence of Christ

Jesus said, 'Surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age'; the abiding presence of Christ.

Yes, talking about God is hard. There is fear of rejection, fear of failure. We sometimes worry that we won't be able to answer people's questions and objections. But Jesus said that we don't have to do it by ourselves. When we run out of words *he* is with us. When we are discouraged, he will be with us to pick us up.

Remember this; it is the Holy Spirit's work to touch people's heart and to give them a desire to follow Jesus. Remember the words of Jesus, 'No one can come to me unless the Father draws him.' In other words, while we are working on the outside, God is working on the inside. That was how it was for us and that is how it will be for others.

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In fulfilling this command, the best thing to do is to start where we are. That means in our homes as we witness to our faith with our loved ones. We must do this gently, prayerfully and in ways that help people to see how important Jesus is to us.

Then, in our church we must renew our mission to children and young people by supporting wholesome, fun-filled activities which teach them about God. We must lay a foundation for them that others can build on.

Then there are outreach activities we can organise to invite people hear the good news of Jesus in ways they can understand and can follow up on. It is always easier to do these things in fellowship with others than on our own. However we do it, if we don't do our part, others won't hear and eventually our churches will die.

Hear again the words of our Lord and Saviour: 'All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptising 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. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.'