

“Go!”

Matthew 28:16-20

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Today we reach the end of our series. We've been in the book of Matthew for the past year and a half, and we conclude with Jesus' command that we call "the Great Commission." A lot of times the church hasn't done what Jesus actually tells us to do here, so it's like we should really call this, "the Great *Omission*." The question for us today might be, are we going to make a difference for Jesus or not? Are we going to be players, or pretenders?

There's a parable that tells how this Great Commission is supposed to be at the heart of what we do as the church, but a lot of times it isn't. There was a lifesaving station on the coast, at a dangerous place where a lot of ships ran into rocks and sank. The crew at the station was ready, and they would send crews out on lifeboats and save many people.

But over the years, they decided, "Let's make our little lifesaving station more comfortable. There's nothing wrong with that!" So, they put in showers and a lounge, and made the station really nice. For people already saved it was great, but it didn't do a lot to help the crew save others that were shipwrecked. Soon they decided to focus on taking better care of the needs of those they'd saved. Nothing wrong with that, except they forgot the mission that was the reason they existed. Nobody noticed they hardly ever got in the boat and went out in the storms any more to rescue those going down. They spent all their time in the warmth of the station.

But Jesus' last instructions to his followers are clear. Get out there, and make a difference. In Matthew 22 Jesus gave the Great Commandment, that "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, and mind." We need to put the Great Commission alongside that. If we love the Lord, then we join his great work of making disciples.

Matthew begins the passage by saying, "Now the eleven disciples came to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus commanded them." There had been twelve disciples, but now Judas was no longer with them.

Twelve was an important number, a biblical number, because it represented the twelve tribes of Israel, and Jesus chose twelve apostles to suggest he was gather together a new people, the fulfillment of everything God was doing through Israel. The family of God that he gathers together in Jesus would be a new Israel, a new humanity, composed of both Jew and Gentile.

But eleven? It's a pathetic number, because it's not twelve. If twelve is completeness, fulfillment, a new people, then eleven means incompleteness, failure, the limping church, bruised and frail. But that's the church Jesus sends out to do his great mission. It's the church that loves its Lord, that worships him, but that still has its doubts. That's the church Jesus commissions to accomplish God's bringing the "up there" down here.

Jesus' command for the church to go make disciples, or followers of him, comes after a reminder of his authority. He's in charge. He's our commander. We do as he commands, and he is with us as we do. So we have Jesus' authority, his mission, and his presence, and this comes through a series of five "alls:" All authority. All nations. All of God. All I have commanded. All the days.

Let's look at each one in turn.

### 1. All authority

Jesus says, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me."

If the church is going to bring the good news about Jesus to the nations, or to all the ethnic groups, we need to recommit ourselves to the Great Commandment to love God with all our heart. If the church is going to fulfill what Jesus tells us to do, then we need to have a vision of the authority—the value, worth, and majesty of Jesus. That's why he begins with the words, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me." All authority.

Psalm 22 is a vision of the suffering of Jesus on the cross, when God loved the world so much he gave his only Son to die for us. It's also a vision of the majesty and authority of Jesus, who wins a victory of sin, death, and the devil. The psalm says,

"All the ends of the earth  
will remember and turn to the LORD,  
and all the families of the nations  
will bow down before him,  
for dominion belongs to the LORD  
and he rules over the nations" (Psalm 22:27-28).

The prophet Daniel had a picture of the authority of Christ, the Son of Man:

"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" (Daniel 7:14).

When we see his majesty, when we hear his authoritative and mighty claim on our lives, then we move in the direction he calls us to go.

I think a part of that is because when we see who he is, we see we can trust he's for us. Like Paul says in Romans 8, "Who is in a position to condemn? Only Christ"—that is, he is indeed God, the only one who can pass ultimate judgment. And listen to how Paul goes on—"Only Christ, and Christ died for us, Christ rose for us, Christ reigns in power for us, Christ prays for us." That's why there's no longer any condemnation for those who belong to Christ. His authority is for us.

It's why Jesus says in the gospel of John,

"No one takes [my life] from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down and authority to take it up again" (John 10:18).

When we know the kind of Savior we have, that he is for us, that he's the Good Shepherd who lays his life down for his sheep, then we can trust him, and we do what he says. Like Jesus says, "I know my sheep and my sheep know me...they will listen to my voice."

It doesn't mean we won't have doubts. Jesus' authority doesn't wipe out our doubts, because he respects our freedom. But he doesn't condemn us for our weakness, either. He didn't say to his disciples, "Oh, so you're still wavering, are you? I can't use you. Get out of here!" He takes us where we are.

Do you sometimes struggle with doubt? Don't despair. There's never been a follower of Jesus who doesn't also have doubts. He takes us, shaky though we are, and he sends us into his service. He has the authority to do it. That leads us into the second thing:

## 2. All nations

This is where Jesus tells us what he wants us to do:

"Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them...and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you."

The therefore is important. Jesus is saying, "You are not your own. You belong to me. So, in light of my authority, do this." In light of the fact he's your Lord, listen to what he tells you.

There are four parts. Did you catch it? *Go. Make disciples. Baptize. And teach.* The core command is simply, "Make disciples," and the others are in a support role. You could say, "As you go and make disciples, baptize and teach in my name." You have power. Or you could say you're as close as can be with the One who has all the power. What's stopping you from going?

Jesus tells us to do something we all can do. He could have said "preach," or "convert," or "win souls." Instead, he just says "disciple," and that means "bring to school." Help others become students, apprentices of Jesus. We can all do that in our own way. We can mentor others, which just means to pass on what we have.

I have a friend named Art who is so good at this, and I think it's because he sees how important it is. Wherever he goes, whether to work as a claims adjuster, or to a kid's baseball game, or to the barbershop, he reaches out to people in his life with authentic friendship, and sooner or later, the conversation always comes around to Jesus.

That's when being a Christian stops being boring, and starts being fun. The great thing about it is you don't have to have a seminary degree, and you don't have to be a natural-born evangelist, and you don't have to take a class in explaining the faith, and you don't have to understand what the creation/evolution debate is about. Some of those things can help, I'm sure, but at the most basic, we just have to have a heart to see others come to know Jesus, and they reach out to them in genuine friendship. It's not just for us, not just for the church, not just for people who think they're good, not just for the middle class, not just for Americans, but Jesus is for the world, for all the ethnic peoples, for all the nations.

"The earth is the Lord's, and everything in it;  
the world, and all who live in it" (Psalm 24:1).

The Lord gave Israel to be a light to the nations, and in the same way, he blesses us in order to make us a blessing to others.

## 3. All of God

Our one God has three names, because he is the three-in-one God. Getting baptized into his name means we belong to him, and it means that people who were divided from him now get brought into

his life. When we get baptized in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, it's more than just a symbol. It's a way God really gets a hold of us, and gives us his undeserved kindness.

What we want is to see people get connected to God through Jesus. Jesus is God in the flesh, the second person of the Trinity, the One in whom "all the fullness of the godhead was pleased to dwell," as Paul said. That's why the ultimate purpose of the church is to tell the good news about Jesus in order to get people to come to trust him, to enter into the life that is in him. When a person does that, they connect with all of who God is, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Not only that, but when we reach out to bring others to this God, then all of who God is, is available to us. His power is for us to do what he calls us to do.

#### 4. All he has commanded

This is what we're teaching—not just good advice but good news, not just truth but also grace. Discipleship is about the whole counsel of God, about giving all of what Jesus taught.

After we've spent nearly a year and a half in the gospel of Matthew, what would you say is the main emphasis? I think it's the commands of Jesus, of the authority of his word. Here it is again. He says, "Teach them to obey all that I've commanded you." In a sense, we enjoy a relationship with Jesus as we seek to obey his commandments. He wants us to keep his word.

Where do we go to know "all that I have commanded you?" For starters, we go to Matthew's gospel, to Jesus' five great teaching discourses. Matthew's given us a handbook on discipleship, and we already have our marching orders in:

- the Sermon on the Mount (chapter 5-7),
- the Sermon on Mission (chapter 10),
- the Sermon on the Kingdom (chapter 13),
- the Sermon on the Church (chapter 18), and
- the Sermon on the End Times (chapter 24-25).

Notice he says, "All I *have* commanded you," not, "all I *will* command you." We already have everything we need for our life and faith in the word he's given us. The Bible is enough, and it's above every other tradition that's come since. Jesus said it would be. We find Jesus in the Bible through his Holy Spirit, and that's where we need to concentrate.

#### 5. All the days

Jesus promises, "I myself am right there with you, all the days." This is Jesus' final assurance for us. When he's with us, we don't need anything else. We're not stranded without him, and we don't have to look to our own resources. The power to keep Jesus' commands, to do what he's just told us to do, is given by him. He takes God's place, because only God can be with you always. He will protect us, and he is the one who empowers us to do what he commands.

I like it that he says he's there all the days, not just the good days, not just the days we feel his presence, not just when we feel spiritually strong, the days we've prayed enough or obeyed enough, but always. Every single day of your life, even when you don't realize it. He's with us up to the end, when the "up there" really does come down here, when

“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.” (Daniel 7:14).

Let me ask you: do you want to be a player? To share with Jesus in his great mission to the world? Because what else is worth giving your life for?