

## “The Commission of the Church”

Matt. 28:18-20

- INTRO. – ILL. – In practically every major sport played in this country, there is one rule that must *not* be broken, or failure is absolutely guaranteed: You must “keep your eye on the ball.”
- If you lose sight of the ball in baseball, you will strike out. In football, you will drop the pass. In golf, you will mis-hit the ball. In tennis, you will hit the net.
- Nothing else matters – a sweet swing, great hand/eye coordination, perfect form, tremendous ability – they are all for naught if you don’t keep your eye on the ball.
- And folks, what is true in sports is also true in life – and in is true in the church. Just as it is important in sports to keep your eye on the ball, so it is critical in the church that we keep our eye on the commission that has been given to us by Jesus Christ!
- ILL. – A couple was traveling through the countryside and they were lost. They spotted an old man on the side of the road and asked, “Where are we?” He said, “Where are you going?” “We don’t know,” they said – to which he then responded back, “Then it doesn’t matter.”
- Listen, when we don’t know clearly where we are going, then it really doesn’t matter where we are, does it? It is only when we know our purpose that we can determine our priorities.
- ILL. – The great military leader, General George S. Patton, before a big battle, would gather his soldiers into a room and would ask them this question, “What is your mission?”
- He knew that *this* was the single most important piece of information every soldier had to know if victory was going to be won. Well, my friend, General Jesus has left us no doubt as to what the mission of His army (called the church) is to be.
- It is known as the Great Commission because it is the one thing we are called to accomplish in this world. It is the singular responsibility of the church.
- And it is called the Great Commission because there is no greater cause in this world. We are Ambassadors of Jesus Christ and we are commanded by Him to fulfill this Great Commission.
- Now, as we have been focusing on what God has to say about the church, we *began* by looking at the house God is building, and the One who is doing the building of that house.
- Then we saw 12 characteristics of a contagious congregation, and last week we spent some time

being reminded of the highest priority of the church – which is to glorify God.

- And now (this morning) we are going to be focusing on the commission of the church. It would be unthinkable for us to go through a series on the church without dealing with the Great Commission.
- But the problem with preaching a sermon on the Great Commission is that is so familiar to all of us. Most of us have heard the Great Commission recited over and over – and most of us have heard many sermons on it.
- But it is like most other principles of the Christian life – we have to be reminded of its truth over and over again, because we have a tendency to get lax in our priorities, and we often need to re-calibrate our lives.
- As familiar as we may be with the Great Commission, we still need to be reminded of its urgency – especially in a world like the one we live in today. Matt. 28:18-20 lays out our marching orders in a nutshell.
- And *not only* does this passage tell us what we are supposed to be doing as a church, it also tells us volumes about what we are *not* to be wasting our time on.
- This commission really focuses our responsibility like a laser beam focuses light. It can serve to

*prevent* us from being *distracted* from the things that count the most.

- Now, I want to break this down into five parts this morning, and first of all, we need to take note of:

## I. THE PERSON OF GOD’S PLAN

- Look at v. 18, “And Jesus came up and spoke to them, saying...” What I want you to note (here) is that it is Jesus Christ who is giving this command. As we have already seen, He is the Lord of His church. He is the One who instituted it, and He is the One who has determined what it is to *be* and *do*.
- The church does *not* belong to us. It is His church. We are merely stewards of what He has established. He is the Master and we are His servants. He is the Lord and we are to be submissive to His lordship.
- He doesn’t need us to have a committee meeting and decide what we should be doing. He doesn’t need us to get creative and come up with a plan for the church. He has already determined that.
- Now, (of course) we might use some creativity in how we go about making disciples, but we already know what His purpose for us is. We don’t have to come up with that. We already know what our commission is.
- But whatever else we might do in the church, we must remember (first and foremost) that Jesus Christ is the Lord of the church, and He is the One who calls the

shots. He is the One who determines what we are to be about.

- Those who are the shepherds in the church are under-shepherds. Those of us who are overseers are overseers under the headship of Christ (and we are accountable to Him).
- Yes, we have His authority to lead, but He is the head. Yes, we have been called by Him to this work, but we are ultimately His stewards, because the church is His household. We are *not* the owners – He is. But notice secondly:

## II. THE POWER OF GOD’S PLAN

- Look at v. 18 again, “And Jesus came up and spoke to them, saying, ‘All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth.’” It is very important that we understand the authority we have in carrying out this commission.
- Before Jesus talks about the *activity* of the church, He explains the *authority* of the church. Here we are told that all the authority of both heaven and earth has been given to Jesus Christ. There is no greater authority than Him. He is Lord of all.
- This makes me think of Phil. 2:9-11, which says, “Therefore also God highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those who are in heaven, and on earth, and

under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”

- Someday every tongue will confess Him as Lord of all. Someday every single person who has ever lived will acknowledge that He has all authority as Lord of all.
- I think of Eph. 1:18-21, where Paul wrote, “*I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened, so that you may know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, and what is the surpassing greatness of His power toward us who believe. These are* in accordance with the working of the strength of His might which He brought about in Christ, when He raised Him from the dead, and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly *places*, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age, but also in the one to come.” His authority is far above all other authority. By virtue of His resurrection and ascension, there is no other authority greater than His authority.
- And (according to Eph. 1) the authority of Jesus has been passed down to the church to proclaim His gospel. That is the point that is being made here. We must proclaim the gospel with boldness and confidence because He have His authority as we make disciples in His name. (Pause) Thirdly we see:

## III. THE PURPOSE OF GOD’S PLAN

- Look at v. 19, “Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations...” (Stop right there) God’s purpose for the church is that we make disciples of all the nations. The gospel is universal in scope, and our part in that is as broad as this planet.
- Of course, no single local church can accomplish this alone, but we *are* to be a part of reaching this entire world with the life-changing message of the gospel. We must be working to fulfill this commission here in our own community, but also around the world.
- And one of the goals of our elders is to increase our mission support each and every year. We want to be actively seeking to do our part in fulfilling the Great Commission. And I believe we need to have a sense of *urgency* in doing this! Things are getting bad, and our time may be running short.
- And I could point to a number of statistics that demonstrate the apathy in many churches. I could point out the fact that more than half of all SBC churches baptized fewer than 5 people last year. I could point to the fact that more than 20% did not baptize anyone.
- I could point to the fact that there is only one church for every 18,000 people in Colorado, or that one mission agency estimated that 81% of all the people living in the Rocky Mountain region are lost without Christ.

- And I could quote statistics all day, but the bottom line is, that even though we know what our commission is, we often fail to do it.
- ILL. – Someone once cleverly wrote the following letter from Jesus Christ and the way the church might respond to it today. Of course, the letter from Jesus would read this way:

Dear Church,

I have been given all power and authority in heaven and earth. Go then to all people and make them My disciples, baptize them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, and teach them to observe, obey, and respect everything I have commanded you. I will be with you always, even to the end of the age. Shalom.

With all my love,  
Jesus Christ

- This is the way the Church leadership might respond in our day and time:

Dear Jesus, Our Lord,

We hereby acknowledge receipt of your memorandum. The proposal sounds very interesting, and we feel that we should probably undertake this project – *not immediately* (of course), but as soon as it is feasible. Due to the shortage of personnel and certain financial considerations, we do *not* feel that we can give it a

proper emphasis at this particular time. A committee, however, has been appointed to study the plan, and we should have a report in a few months. In the meantime, we are honored to know that you have considered us for this task, and we appreciate your offer to serve as our resource person should we choose to undertake it. You may rest assured that it will be given careful consideration by our committee, and we hope to have an answer at our earliest convenience.

Your Obedient Servents,  
The Church

- Folks, when you read the Great Commission, you are *not* reading a suggestion. We don't refer to it as "The Great Suggestion" or even as "The Great Request." It is the Great Commission. It is a command from our Lord.
- This is *not* a recommendation for us to consider. It is *not* a motion that requires a second. It is not up for a majority vote – it can't even be debated, discussed, or amended. This is a command from the King of the universe!!!
- Someone said (and said well) many years ago, that they have no fear that the church will *not* succeed – but that it will succeed in that which does *not* really matter. (Pause) The fact is, if we are not making disciples for Jesus Christ, we have failed in our mission in the church.
- I have been in some *amazing* church buildings. I have seen (as you probably have) church buildings that are so ornate and elaborate, they are almost beyond comprehension. But when the church leadership stand before the Lord of the church one day, He will *not* care one lick about the beauty of the buildings. The only thing He will care about, is how many disciples of His we have made.
- Folks, it is so easy for the mission of the church to become neglected in favor of other things. There are so many other good things we can become involved with, that can crowd out the priority of the Great Commission.
- It is so easy for us to become "keepers of the aquarium" instead of "fishers of men." It is so easy for a church to lose its first love, and to become a "mausoleum for the saints" instead of a "hospital for sinners."
- Oh, I pray that we will *not* fall into that kind of complacency and neglect. I pray that we will keep our Lord's commission ever before us as the focus of everything we do.
- If we ever get to the place where we are no longer making disciples for Jesus Christ, then we will no longer have a right to call ourselves a church, because Jesus said that *this* is what His church is to be about.
- The single purpose for the church is to get God and man together. The Bible calls this "the ministry of

reconciliation.” If we are not bringing people to God through the Lord Jesus Christ, then we are *not* the church – we are simply doing social work. (Pause) Notice fourthly:

#### IV. THE PROCEDURE OF GOD’S PLAN

- Now, the structure of this command is often misunderstood. In fact, it is often missed in many sermons. But it is important for us to understand that there is only one command here. There is only one verb.
- That verb is modified by three participles. Do you remember participles from your English Grammar class? What are they? They are modifiers. They modify verbs.
- And do you remember what *form* they usually take? They are usually words that end in “ing.” Some people (today) might think that grammar is *not* really that important, but in a proper interpretation of the Scripture it is vitally important. And such is the case here.
- The *command* (here) is to make disciples – but that verb clause is modified by three participles. The participles are *going*, *baptizing*, and *teaching*. But when we get to the end of the process, the result should be a fully mature disciple of Jesus Christ.
- The singular purpose for the church is to make disciples, but there are three aspects of how we are to

go about that responsibility. First of all, there is the aspect of:

#### A. Going

- Most translations have this as “Go,” so we might think it is a verb, but it is in the participial form. It would be better translated as “going” or “as you go.” You see, the Lord knew that the Christians were soon going to be scattered all throughout the world (primarily through persecution) so He was saying, “as you go into the world, make disciples of all the nations among whom you are scattered.”
- This (of course) was an early indication that the gospel would become available to the Gentiles and *not* just the Jews – but for us, it is an admonition to what is often called “lifestyle evangelism.” It means that we are to be witnesses for Christ wherever we are.
- And what we need to understand (here) is that the Bible’s emphasis is *not* really on some kind of organized outreach effort, but on proclaiming the gospel in our everyday lives.
- That is *not* to say that we should never be involved in any organized outreach efforts, but what it is saying is that this should be something natural to us, that we would want to witness for Christ in every social setting we may find ourselves.
- The idea is, that Jesus Christ will be such an integral part of our lives, that everywhere we go we will be

telling people about Him. It is the idea that we will be so excited about how He has redeemed us (and given us eternal life that we don't deserve) that we will *not* be able to keep it to ourselves. It will just naturally come out in our conversation with people around us.

- But the question for us this morning is, "Are we doing that? Are we gossiping the gospel?" That is literally how the NT reads, but are we doing that?
- By the way, did you know that nowhere in the Bible are we told to bring non-Christians *to the church* in order to win them to Christ? Certainly, there is nothing wrong with that, and that may (in fact) be the way that some people get saved, but that is *not* really the strategy of the Great Commission. The strategy of the Great Commission is to go out where they are and disciple them.
- I think the modern church growth movement, and (in particular) the Seeker Sensitive Movement has turned this around. We now think that the purpose for the church when it gathers is (primarily) evangelism, and that we need to bring everything we do on Sunday mornings down to the level of unchurched Harry and Mary, and stay away from teaching doctrine, because what we need to do (in the minds of many today) is to "dumb everything down" so the lost can understand it.
- But folks, evangelism is *not* (primarily) the biblical purpose for the church when it gathers corporately. When we gather together for corporate worship, our primary purpose is to worship God and to build up the

saints through the faithful proclamation of His Word. And then, we are to *go out* and evangelize in the world. That is the will of Christ for His church.

- And if Jesus Christ were to come back to planet earth today, He would *not* ask the people on the *outside*, "Why didn't you come?" He would ask those of us on the *inside*, "Why didn't you go?" (Pause) The first participle is "going." But then there is:

### B. Baptizing

- We must never be apologetic about baptizing those who become disciples of Jesus Christ. This is part of our mandate! It is absolutely scriptural for those who become Christians to become baptized.
- Now, let me be clear – you don't have to be baptized in water in order to be saved – but Jesus said that those who *get* saved are to be baptized "in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the HS."
- *Not only* are we to *make* disciples, but we are also to *mark* the disciples. And we do that with baptism. What is baptism? It is a public identification with Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord. It is a symbol that a person has become a disciple of Jesus Christ.
- And listen, it *ought* to be the first act of obedience in the life of every new believer. I often use the illustration of baseball and say that this is like touching first base. It is *not* necessary for salvation, but it ought

to be the first thing a new believer desires to do in demonstration of his spiritual regeneration.

- And we clearly see this pattern all the way through the NT. All through the Book of Acts, we see new believers being baptized immediately after they come to know Christ.
- My friend listen, if you are a Christian, but you have never been scripturally baptized, what are you waiting for? You are in disobedience to the One you are claiming as your Lord.
- No, it won't keep you out of heaven if you don't do it, but it *can* rob you of your joy and peace, because this is a basic command from our Lord. Jesus Christ has commanded that we baptize all those who become His disciples "in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the HS." (Pause) But there is a third participle, and that is the aspect of:

### C. Teaching

- *Not only* are we to *make* disciples, and to *mark* disciples, but we are also to *mature* disciples. Please understand, evangelism that ends in the baptistery is *not* real evangelism. Birth is only the beginning of the process. The responsibility of making disciples does *not* end when someone makes a profession of faith (or even when they are baptized).
- In fact, the work has just *begun* (at that point), because then we have the responsibility to teach them all that

Christ has commanded us – and guess how long that takes? The rest of their lives.

- But folks, this part of the Great Commission is why we put so much emphasis (here) on preaching and teaching God's Word. You see, teaching all that Christ has commanded means teaching the whole counsel of God – and that doesn't happen in 6 easy lessons.
- It takes years of reading and studying the Scriptures, and even then we won't have it all down perfectly. Theologians call this "progressive sanctification," and it is something that we are to give *serious* attention to.
- As Eph. 4 tells us, this is the reason why God has given pastor/teachers to the church – so that we might "...all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fulness of Christ." (Eph. 4:13)
- This is the plan Jesus has given us. We are to lead people to a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ, baptize them into a local fellowship of believers (called the church), and then take that young convert and teach him all the commands of Christ, so that he (in turn) can disciple someone else. And it is through this process that the Lord builds His church.
- But there is one more thing we need to see in this passage of Scripture this morning, and that is:

### V. THE PROMISE OF GOD'S PLAN

- Look with me at the last part of v. 20, "...and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age." What a wonderful promise this is! Of all the promises of God in Scripture, this may be the greatest of all!
- You see, whatever we may face in this world (as we seek to proclaim the gospel), we know He is there with us as we face it.
- And although it is true that our world is often characterized by broken promises and forsaken relationships, we *never* have to wonder whether Jesus Christ will be with us, because we have His word on it. And He is absolutely trustworthy!
- And you know what? With the promise of His presence – that means we have absolutely *nothing* to fear! There is absolutely nothing in this world that we cannot face, as long as He is with us!
- These are our marching orders. If disciples are *not* being made in a church, then *neither* the beauty of the buildings *nor* the size of the budget *nor* the eloquence of the preaching *nor* the melody of the music makes any difference whatsoever.
- ILL. – Years ago there was a Mercedes Benz commercial that showed their car colliding with a cement wall during a safety test. Someone then asked the company spokesman why they did *not* enforce their patent on the Mercedes Benz energy-absorbing car body, (a design that was obviously copied by other

companies because of its successful safety record). The spokesman gave a classic response. He said, "Because some things in life are too important *not* to share."

- My friend, the gospel (that we have been given) is too important *not* to share. The mission we have been given is too important *not* to fulfill.
- APPEAL
- PRAYER