

The Great Commission

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Salem

Various

INTRODUCTION:

Well... It is official! Traci, the girls, and I have now been with this congregation for three years.

- Over the past three years, we have said “**good bye**” to some of our members as life circumstances have changed.
- And we have been blessed with new additions to the family here as well!
- It is always encouraging to me to get to know people who have chosen to join us in our worship services.
- It is even more encouraging to reach and teach those who are not Christians and to see them come to the point that they obey the gospel of Jesus Christ.

This evening, I would like for us to focus our attention on church growth and one of the last commands (and most important) commands that Jesus ever gave!—The Great Commission.

- There are literally thousands of religious organizations in the world that have this as their prime objective—to seek and to save the lost.
- Some good examples might be World Radio, or Gospel Broadcast Network, or In Search of the Lord’s Way, one of the many Christian Universities, or a children’s home.
- In the time that I have been preaching, however, there is one particular organization that stands out in my mind as being the more effective at reaching more souls for less money.

As far as world evangelism is concerned, I do not know of any better way of reaching a large number of searching souls than the World Bible School.

- You may have noticed the bulletin board at the bottom of the ramp outside the back doors—but this organization uses Bible correspondence courses to teach the gospel to people all over the world.
- As a matter of fact, WBS has just announced that they have now reached at least one student of the Bible in EVERY single country of the world.
- This is of particular significance when you understand that the smallest country in the world is only 8 square miles.

This evening, however, I would like for us to focus on local evangelism.

- As I was doing the research for this evening’s lesson, I ran across an article by one preacher who suggested somehow reversing the fan motor on the church’s furnace and somehow creating a powerful vacuum that would actually pull people off of the street and suck them into the congregation.
- As I read that suggestion, I realized just how desperate some churches have become!

This evening, I would like for us to consider a very serious command that came through Jesus himself in some of the last words he ever spoke on this earth.

- After his resurrection and before his ascension back into heaven, Jesus gave what we sometimes refer to as being the Great Commission.
- The first account is found in **Matthew 28**—right at the end of the first book in the New Testament.

I’ll be reading **Matthew 28:18-20**...

- 18 *And Jesus came up and spoke to them, saying, “All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth.*
- 19 *“Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit,*
- 20 *teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.”*

Another account of this same statement is found in **Mark 16:15-16**.

- 15 *And He said to them, “Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation.*
- 16 *“He who has believed and has been baptized shall be saved; but he who has disbelieved shall be condemned.*

A third very similar account is found in **Luke 24:45-48**.

- 45 *Then He opened their minds to understand the Scriptures,*
- 46 *and He said to them, “Thus it is written, that the Christ would suffer and rise again from the dead the third day,*
- 47 *and that repentance for forgiveness of sins would be proclaimed in His name to all the nations, beginning from Jerusalem.*
- 48 *“You are witnesses of these things.*

When we combine the various aspects of these three accounts, we get a very clear picture of our mission in the church—**“Go in His name who has all power, and preach the gospel to every creature of all nations. Whoever believes, repents, and is baptized into the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, shall be saved through the forgiveness of sins. Those who are baptized are to be taught to observe all things that Jesus had commanded. He will be with them as they preach. This is to continue until the end of the world.”** That is the mission of this congregation!

As we think about this Great Commission, I would like for us to turn back to Matthew’s account and notice several applications for all of us here at the Salem congregation.

- I. As we look back at the words of Jesus in **Matthew 28**, we realize that **WE ARE TO REACH OUT TO ALL PEOPLE AND THAT IT STARTS RIGHT WHERE WE ARE—RIGHT NOW.**

Nearly all of the commentaries on this passage point out something very interesting about the grammar of this sentence in the Greek language.

- In most of our English translations, the main command of the Great Commission appears to be **“Go”**—as if we are located in one place, and in order to fulfill the command, we need to move to another location before we start teaching and preaching—as if we need to move from Salem to Africa or from Salem to China.
- However, the commentaries point out that as far as grammar is concerned, the only command in the Great Commission is to **“make disciples.”**

The **“go”** would more accurately be translated as, **“As you are going,”** or even, **“Having gone.”**

- That really changes the meaning of the Great Commission, doesn’t it? **“Having gone into all the world, we are to make disciples of all the people around us.”**
- We are thousands of miles from Jerusalem, where this command was first given.
- Not only that, but we are nearly 2000 years removed from that situation.

- In other words, we are the ones who have gone into the world—we are the ones Jesus was referring to in the Great Commission.
- Having gone, our mission is to make disciples.
- In other words, we fulfill this command by reaching out to all people—right where we are—right now.

Even if we were to only look at statistics, we would find that the church grows best when Christians contact those who are closest to them with the gospel.

- We can think about this congregation.
- Most additions have come when our own members have taught their own friends and relatives.
- We have gospel meetings, and ladies days, Bible studies, and ads in the yellow pages, but personal contact with a close friend is far more effective than any of those other methods.

I find it interesting that God has left this mission of reaching the lost completely up to us.

- Even in New Testament times, God did not miraculously appear to people and tell them directly what to do to be saved; but instead, God worked through regular people.
- We can think about the Ethiopian Eunuch in **Acts 8**.
- It would have been very easy for God to appear to that man on the chariot and tell him what to do, but instead, God arranged for Phillip to meet the Ethiopian on the road.

We could also think about Paul's conversion in **Acts 9**.

- Jesus appeared on the road to Damascus; however, not only did Jesus not save Paul at that time, but he also did not tell him to be baptized.
- Jesus left that to a Christian named Ananias.
- Even today, then, we as Christians remain a vital role in God's plan for reaching the world around us.
- Having gone into the world, we are to fulfill the Great Commission by starting with those around us.

II. There is a second application of the Great Commission, and it has to do with the **URGENCY OF MAKING PEOPLE DISCIPLES OF JESUS CHRIST**.

Because of the culture we are in, though, it is very easy to get a little confused as to who is and is not going to heaven.

- Since 9/11, the main false doctrine that is sweeping our nation is that it doesn't matter what you believe—as long as you are peaceful.
- Whether you are a Christian, or Muslim, or Buddhist, or Mormon, or even an atheist—as long as you are not a terrorist, your religion is good.
- Just be peaceful, be a good, moral person, and in the end, anyone who is nice will go to heaven.

Unfortunately, not every nice person will go to heaven; and yet that is exactly what many churches believe and teach.

- In the field of church growth research, there has been a huge push in recent years to reach those who are **“unchurched.”**
- And at first, it sounds so good—**“We are going to reach the ‘unchurched’ in our community.”**
- However, as we look at what the Bible actually says about denominationalism, we realize that we should not limit our evangelism to those who do not have a church home.
- We realize that many people—even those who claim to be religious and those who are active in their denominations—are not as safe as they might think.

- According to Jesus himself (in **Matthew 25**), even religious people, even *“many,”* Jesus said, who claim to be Christians—will be surprised on the Judgment Day to find out that they are actually in a lost condition.
- In the Great Commission, then, Jesus is emphasizing the urgency of *“making disciples.”*

We can also see the urgency of this mission when we look at Mark’s account in **Mark 16:15-16**.

- Jesus said, *“Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation. He who has believed and has been baptized shall be saved; but he who has disbelieved shall be condemned.”*
- Have you ever considered what it would be like to die and then to stand before God in judgment having never even heard of Jesus Christ?
- What a horrible shock that must be!

And then on the other hand, what a terrifying responsibility for all of us—to know that someone’s eternal destiny may hinge on whether we can get up the courage to explain the gospel.

- In the Great Commission—in **Matthew 28:20**, Jesus basically says, **“Don’t worry about that! I am with you!”**
- Jesus is with us in those situations!
- When we are talking with a neighbor, and when he says that, **“It doesn’t matter what you believe, that all people are going to heaven anyway,”** Jesus is with us in that situation.
- It is tempting to be afraid and maybe to let that slide, but Jesus is with us in that situation.
- He is with us during those 15 minutes when the line shuts down for a break at the plant.
- He is with us at the fax machine or the water cooler. He is with us at school.
- We know this because he gave a promise that he would be with us until this world comes to an end.

We learn, then, that there is a terrifying urgency to making people disciples of Jesus Christ.

- This urgency is illustrated in several parables in **Luke 15**.
- Some of the religious leaders were cutting on Jesus for spending time with sinful people, and Jesus responded with three parables—the lost sheep, the lost coin, and the lost son.
- In the parable of the lost coin, a woman has ten silver coins and loses one of those coins.
- She basically tears the house apart until she finds that coin.
- I think we all understand what it means to lose something very important.

In our household, it is not an uncommon experience for one of us to have troubles locating our car keys.

- I have heard, however, that there is a key ring that is now available that makes a loud beeping noise whenever it hears a whistle.
- From what I understand, though, it tends to be so sensitive that whenever it hears one of the kids screaming or hears other noises that it goes off and can be very annoying.
- The point is, we hate to lose things, and we will take extreme measures to find something once it is lost.

When we lose the TV remote, we tear the couch apart until we find it.

- When we lose a wallet, we search high and low until we find it.

On the other hand, what happens when we have an old sock come out of the laundry with no match?

- Do we go searching high and low for an old sock that probably has a hole in the heel anyway?
- It is not a big deal, because the sock is not very valuable.

We need to tie this in with our Christian faith and the Great Commission.

- When a soul is lost, how do we view that situation?

- Hopefully, we do not handle it the same way we would handle a lost sock.
- The correct response is to drop what we are doing and figuratively “tear the house apart” until we “find” that person!
- Jesus, then, is saying that there is an extreme sense of urgency when it comes to making disciples.
- It has to be the church’s number one priority.

III. There is a third application of the Great Commission, and to make this application, I’d like for us to notice **THE IMPORTANCE THAT IS PLACED ON THE WORD OF GOD IN ALL THREE ACCOUNTS OF THE GREAT COMMISSION.**

In **Matthew 28:20**, Jesus said, “teaching them to observe all that I commanded you....”—a reference to all of the spoken words of Jesus during his ministry.

- In **Mark 16:15**, Jesus said, “Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation.”—a reference to the gospel, or the good news about the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus.
- In **Luke 24:45-46**, the Bible says, “Then He opened their minds to understand the Scriptures, and He said to them, “Thus it is written, that the Christ would suffer and rise again from the dead the third day....”—a reference to the written word of God—especially the Old Testament scriptures.
- Jesus based the Great Commission on the word of God.

All through the New Testament, the phrase “word of God” is emphasized over and over again.

- In fact, that phrase is found at least 42 times in the New Testament.
 - *The seed is the word of God...*
 - *My mother and my brothers are those who hear the word of God and do it...*
 - *Blessed rather are those who hear the word of God and keep it...*
 - *They were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God with boldness...*
 - *It is not right that we should give up preaching the word of God...*
 - *And the word of God increased; and the number of disciples multiplied greatly...*
 - *Samaria had received the word of God...*
 - *The Gentiles had also received the word of God...*
 - *But the word of God grew and multiplied...*
 - *When they arrived in Salamis, they proclaimed the word of God...*
 - *He was with the proconsul, Sergius Paulus, a man of intelligence, who summoned Barnabas and Saul and sought to hear the word of God...*
 - *They were glad and glorified the word of God...*
 - *And they stayed a year and six months, teaching the word of God among them...*
 - *You received the word of God which you heard from us...*
 - *For the word of God is living and active...*

There are a hundred gimmicks we could use to try to manipulate people into becoming Christians, but the word of God, the gospel, is God’s power for salvation.

- We understand the words of Peter in **1 Peter 1:23**, “for you have been born again not of seed which is perishable but imperishable, that is, through the living and enduring word of God.”

SUMMARY:

This evening, then, we have studied some of the last words of Jesus here on this earth.

- We can fulfill his commission right where we are, right now.
- Our primary mission is to make people disciples of Christ—this happens when people hear the gospel, believe in Jesus, repent, and are baptized.

- And thankfully, all of this is based on the word of God, and not on our weaknesses as human beings.

CONCLUSION:

As we close our thoughts on this subject, and as we consider an opportunity to invite our friends to worship with us next Sunday, I would like to share with you the Parable of the Life-Saving Station...

On a dangerous seacoast where shipwrecks often occur, there was once a crude little lifesaving station. The building was just a hut, and there was only one boat, but the few devoted members kept a constant watch over the sea, and with no thought for themselves they went out day and night tirelessly searching for the lost. Many lives were saved by this wonderful little station, so that it became famous. Some of those who were saved, and various others in the surrounding area, wanted to associate and give their time and money. New boats were purchased and new crews were trained. The little lifesaving station grew.

Some of the new members of the lifesaving station were unhappy that the building was so crude and so poorly equipped. They felt that a more comfortable place should be provided as the first refuge of those saved from the sea. So they replaced the emergency cots with beds and put better furniture in an enlarged building. Now the lifesaving station became a popular gathering place for its members, and they redecorated it beautifully and furnished it exquisitely. Fewer members were now interested in going on lifesaving missions, so they hired lifeboat crews. The lifesaving motif still prevailed in the club decoration and there was a liturgical lifesaving boat in the meeting room. About this time, a large ship was wrecked off the coast, and the hired crews brought in boatloads of cold, wet and half-drowned people. They were dirty and sick and some of them were foreigners. The beautiful new club was considerably messed up. So the property committee immediately had a shower house built outside the club where victims of shipwreck could be cleaned up before coming inside.

At the next meeting, there was a split in the club membership. Most of the members wanted to stop the club's lifesaving activities as being unpleasant and a hindrance to the normal social life of the club. Some members insisted upon lifesaving as their primary purpose and pointed out that it was still called a lifesaving station. But they were finally voted down and told that if they wanted to save lives of all the various kinds of people who were shipwrecked in those waters, they could begin their own lifesaving station down the coast. They did.

As the years went by, the new station experienced the same changes that had occurred in the old. It evolved into a club, and yet another lifesaving station was founded. History continued to repeat itself, and today you will find a number of exclusive clubs along that shore. Shipwrecks are still frequent in those waters. Unfortunately, the lifesaving club members are too busy with other activities, and many of the shipwreck victims end up drowning.

INVITATION:

The Bible today, teaches the same thing that it taught nearly 2000 years ago. It still teaches that those who have believed and have been baptized will be saved.