

The Great Commission: Reaching and Teaching the Nations Matthew 28:16-20

Matthew 28 is one of the most important chapters in the Bible. It begins with the **greatest news** and ends with **the greatest mission**.

Advent and Resurrection

Matthew links many of the first scenes of the gospel with this last scene.

He links **Advent with Resurrection!** **This is one big story!**

- **At his birth, an ancient prophecy is cited about the identity of Jesus being “Immanuel, God with us” (1:23).**
 - Here we read, “I am with you always.”
- **At his birth, Jesus is called king of the Jews (2:2).**
 - Here we read, “All authority ... has been given to me.”
- **At his birth, wise men come from Gentile lands to worship Jesus.**
 - Here, the disciples worship and Jesus sends them to the Gentiles.

So it's a wonderful conclusion.

We are *not* doing an Advent Sermon Series, *but we are* doing an Advent Sermon Series because we're talking about Gospel, Community and Mission! In one sense, we're always doing an Advent Series at IDC! (Next three weeks: Genesis 3; Isaiah 42; Titus 2:11-14).

This King was born to die; born to rise; born to give us second birth; born to reign as King of the nations!

Great Commission: Significance

If you are **new to the Bible or a kid**, please see how important this passage is.

- We call it: **“The Great Commission.”**

S.E. Johnson: “No part of the Bible, with the possible exception of the letter to the Romans, has done more to give Christians the vision of a world-wide church.”

I have never preached on it at IDC, but it's probably the most cross-referenced text at our church. **Sinclair Ferguson** tells the story of a theology professor in Scotland in the 1960's. He had many strange mannerisms and idiosyncrasies. He had **a monocle in one eye** (a corrective lens in one eye). He was a widely acclaimed professor, and **was honored by the Queen. He had military distinctions....** They had regular chapel services among the theology faculty, and every time **this prof would preach, he would preach on exactly the same text! And it became something of a joke.** And so people would **lose interest.** And some wouldn't attend. **And this was his text: Matthew 28:18-20.** Ferguson says he would stand up with his squeaky little voice and say, “Our text today is Matthew 28:18-20.” Ferguson says, **“About 20 years later, it dawned on me why my esteemed professor was doing this. It wasn't because he didn't know anything else in the Bible. It was because he understood that these words are actually among the most important and significant words in the whole Bible.”**

Well, we don't preach on it every week – but it should always be in view.

- **The last command of Jesus must be the first priority of the church.**

It has impacted millions, including the great missionary **William Carey**.

- He is known as **“the father of the modern missions movement.”**
- He was born in **1761 and died in 1834.**
- He left England in **1793 as a missionary to India** never to return home again
- He was poor with only a grammar school education, and yet he would **translate the Bible into dozens of languages and dialects, and he established schools and mission stations all over India.**
- **Timothy George:** “His resume - education, minimal; degrees, none; savings, depleted; political influence, nil; references, a band of country preachers half a world away. What are his resources? A weapon: love; a desire: to bring the light of God into the darkness; a strategy: to proclaim by life, lips, and letters the unsearchable riches of Christ” (George, 93). (Sounds like the disciples!)

Matthew 28:16-20 was Carey’s farewell text to his church at Harvey Lane before departing to India.

The respected minister John Ryland Sr. had rebuked Carey earlier saying, **“Young man sit down. When God pleases to convert the heathen, He will do without your aid or mine”** (George, 53).

He was a prophet to the church. He was said, **“I question whether all are justified in staying here, while so many are perishing without means of grace in other lands.”** (sec. 50).

William Carey got the Great Commission.

Or should we say, **“The Great Commission got him!”**

Has it gotten you? Let’s look at this text in three parts:

#1: The Christ We Worship (28:16-17)

Most biographies end at the grave. Jesus’ doesn’t!

The Romans execute Jesus – the leader of this lightly organized movement. They crucified him publically and shamefully.

- **His followers cowered in fear before and during this crucifixion.**
- **But afterward, instead of disintegrating, the movement exploded!**
- **What happened? What happened was on the third day, Jesus stepped out into the sunlight as the vindicated Son of God.**
- **His followers were transformed. They worshiped Him and became his bold witnesses to the ends of the earth.**

How did a little movement in rural Galilee reach people in Raleigh, NC? Jesus rose! And people followed this command!

Here the Christian mission has its starting-point: in a meeting with the risen Jesus, the King over all.

If you know Him, treasure Him, worship Him; you will be His witness.

It will be an overflow.

A Meeting in Galilee (16-17)

The Time? We’re not told exactly but we can piece some things together.

- This meeting was after the meeting on **the Road to Emmaus (Lk 24).**

- probably after his appearances to the disciples in **Jn 20** & the 7 in **John 21**.
- **before his ascension in Acts 1** – which was forty days after the resurrection.
- So this meeting probably took place **three or four weeks after the resurrection**. Some time before the Ascension in Jerusalem.

The Group?

- Matthew doesn't say this meeting was **exclusively** with the disciples.
- They were present. But he doesn't say it was **only** them.
- Further, "some" doubted. Is this a different group?
- Many scholars argue that **more than the eleven were present**, namely, those who "doubted" or "hesitated." This makes sense. **The disciples had seen him but many had not.**

Leon Morris, "It is difficult to think that the hesitation was coming from the eleven, considering all that had happened to them during the recent past."

Morris and many other contend that it is quite possible that the "over 500 at one time" that Paul talks about is this meeting (1 Cor 15:6).

- Remember, **Galilee was the where the majority of the followers were.**
- Later in **Jerusalem, only 120 gathered**. So it makes sense that the meeting with the 500 took place here in Galilee where there were more followers. .

At any rate, on some hillside, to ordinary common people, the Risen Christ appeared.

- **1 Cori 1:26ff** - "Not many of you were wise... not many were powerful... not many of noble birth..."
- Far from the crowds of Jerusalem, Jesus appears and commissions this group.

If you think you come from the wrong kind of family to be used by the King, think again!

- Don't ever think, "Jesus can never use me. Have you seen my family?"
- You're not thinking biblically when you think like that. Have you read Genesis!?! You don't have to read very far at all to see that God only uses flawed, ordinary people, many of them have lives filled with drama!
- **And here we read who the risen King appeared to! Not the elite!**

The question is not "Am I worthy enough?" but "Am I available?"

"Here I am send me!"

"but some doubted" –The expression can simply denote **hesitation, not opposition or firm unbelief**. There is a **"vitreous doubt"** – a person seeking understanding. There's a defensive doubt that denies the possibility of answers.

- Thomas doubted and then believed.
- These on the hillside could have for the first time saw the risen Christ.
- And remember, he had a **glorified body!** They weren't the only ones having a hard time recognizing him! (Luke 24:16; Jn 21:4)
- It seems that they're simply trying to make sense of it all.

Worship: And this is where disciple making begins!

- When the women saw the risen Jesus they worshipped him (v. 9), and now others do the same... They will also go and tell like the women...
- **When you are consumed with the glory of the King, his mission will be an overflow.**
- **Missionary enthusiasm flows out of an enthusiasm for the King.**
- **Acts 4:20:** “for we are unable to stop speaking about what we have seen and heard.”
- **Can’t stop; won’t stop!** These former cowards can’t stop because they’ve seen the risen King!
- Previously, they had seen glimpses of glory, but after the resurrection the glory overwhelmed them!

Illustration: Rupp Arena for the first time – cheap TV to real game. I couldn’t stop talking about it.

#2: The Command We Obey (28:18-20a)

Because Jesus is the King, we must submit to his mission.

- We don’t negotiate with the King.
- We can’t excuse ourselves from this command.

“The Great Commission is not an option to be considered; it is a command to be obeyed.” H. Taylor

A. All Authority

Jesus is claiming something that only God can claim.

It has anticipated his ascension and his enthronement.

The universe is in subjection to Him. Every square inch, “Mine!”

- To have authority means to have *the right and power* to do something.
 - forgiving sins, casting out demons, teaching, and more,
- He has the right and power to send his disciples into the whole world to make disciples.
- This is the **basis for the Commission.**
- Jesus echoes **Daniel 7**. He is the Son of Man who has all authority over the whole earth. (cf., **Ps 2**)

This truth undergirds the believer’s **confidence** in fulfilling the Great Commission.

- Notice the bookends of this Commission in verses 18 and 20 – his authority and his presence.

The GC would be totally outrageous if it weren’t for these two bookends!

Jesus is saying: **“You aren’t idiots when you do this! “I am commissioning you! You are my Ambassadors! I am the King”**

His universal authority leads to a universal mission.

- **Acts** – Jesus, the Sovereign Lord, has authority to call people out of darkness into light (including Saul of Tarsus); he has authority to answer prayer; open hearts to hear the gospel; free people from prison and more.

We go in his confidence – **If Jesus weren’t sovereign, missions would be a futile enterprise.**

B. Make Disciples

Technically the one imperative or command of verse 19 is: **“make disciples.”**

- Not **“make decisions”** but make disciples of Jesus.
- Discipleship begins with a decision, but the goal is total allegiance to the King.
- The goal is not to make some nominal Christians!

Tied to this imperative are **3 participles**: “going, baptizing and teaching.”

- They receive the force and thrust of imperatives.

The mandate is clear: **make disciples by going, baptizing, and teaching.**

C. Make disciples by Going

We must go – the church is a troop carrier, not a cruise ship.

For every believer, this means living with gospel intentionality:

As you go, live with intentionality.

- o **As you go across the street**
- o **As you go to dinner with an unbelieving friend**
- o **As you go coach little league**
- o **As you go to work**
- o **As you go live among the poor and the immigrant community**

Missions involves ordinary people doing ordinary things with gospel intentionality.

For some believers, this means going internationally:

- Those who stay here must give support through **prayer and finances and encouragement.**
- These are **critical ministries.**
- We are a part of the **same team.**

D. Nations

Not all the **political states of the world**, but all the ethnic and language groupings of the peoples.

- **As Rev 5:9 says, “every tribe and language and people and nation.”**
- **Hundreds of them haven’t heard the gospel!**

We talk about the second coming, most of the world hasn’t heard of the 1st!

To become a Christ-follower involves taking on the kinds of things Jesus is about – and he’s about the nations.

And it will involve taking on **the sufferings of Christ** as a result...

- **This message will get some missionaries killed.**
- **And here in the States it will get you ridiculed and labeled as arrogant, intolerant, and dangerous.**

Whether you stay at home or go abroad, we’re all called to go.

The Christian mission of disciple-making doesn’t involve playing “Red Rover.” We must not stand inside the church building and pray, **“Lord send them all over.”**

We must go! We don’t play **duck-duck-goose either!** We go to all of them.

In Carey’s day, many argued against the need for missionaries. They had an anti-missions hymns:

**“Go into all the world,
The Lord of old did say.
But now where He has planted thee,
There thou shouldst stay.”**

One prominent pastor closed a sermon quoting this hymn saying, “The so-called missionaries are not needed today.” (in Akin)

Wrong! They were then, and they are now! Fortunately, Carey, Fuller, and others saw things differently and led a great missions movement.

E. Make disciples by *Baptizing*

Because baptism was so closely associated with the **confession of faith in Jesus** in Acts 2:38, 8:36–38 and 10:47–48, it may be best to see baptizing as Jesus’ way of summarizing the **evangelistic part of the disciples’ ministry** – it is the **reaching aspect of the commission**.

Danny Akin: “Here is the badge of being a disciple. Here is where biblical profession of faith takes place. Here is my unashamed identification with Jesus as my Lord by public declaration.”

Jesus says as you MAKE disciples, go MARK disciples.

Mark them through baptism – the first step of obedience as a disciple.

HB Charles: “Baptism is no man-made tradition that you can reject at your discretion.”

- Jesus commands it!
- In baptism, the immersed one is professing, “ I have died with Christ and I have been raised to walk in new life.”
- We are pledging allegiance to the King!

And this is a work of grace!

“Name” – singular, not “names.” But then the singular: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The Triune God. One God in three persons.

- A Trinitarian statement here in the GC.
- Why mentioned the Trinity? **Well the entire Godhead is at work in salvation.**
- **The Father administrated it, the Son accomplished it on the cross, and the Holy Spirit applied it to our lives.**
- Here we see the **privilege of the gospel**.

May God use us to lead many others to profess faith in Jesus Christ – like we have witnessed today!

Do you need to profess faith in Jesus through baptism?

In the book of Acts these baptized believers gathered as the church and were discipled in the context of a believing community (Acts 2).

F. Make disciples by *Teaching*

Not just “give information” but teach them to “to observe” (obey/keep/do)

- Teach them to be doers of the Word
- Rom 1 – “to bring about the obedience of faith for the sake of his name among the nations”
- **The devil knows the Bible.**
- **Our goal is not to lift people to the devil’s level!**
- Teach for transformation not just information transfer

One of the things we want **them to obey is this very text!** That's multiplication!

The Nations need **indigenous teachers and churches.**

So here we have **the other half of the job– teach them, see that they grow/mature.**

“All that I have commanded you”

- Not **just the favorite verses.** All of it is profitable! Teach the whole council of God (Acts 20)
- The church is a family of learners.
- We are a family of disciple makers.

The book of **Acts** is filled the examples of the church obeying the King's Mission.

- We strictly charged you not to teach in this name, yet here you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching (5:28)
- And every day, in the temple and from house to house, they did not cease teaching and preaching that the Christ is Jesus. (Acts 5:42)
- Now those who were scattered went about preaching the word. (Acts 8:4)
- how I did not shrink from declaring to you anything that was profitable, and teaching you in public and from house to house (Acts 20:20)
- He lived there two whole years at his own expense, and welcomed all who came to him, ³¹ proclaiming the kingdom of God and teaching about the Lord Jesus Christ with all boldness and without hindrance. (28:30-31)

Examples of Disciple-making through teaching in the NT:

- Here in **Matthew 28** – discipling the unbelieving world.
- **Parents** discipling children: **Ephesians 6:1-4**
- **Women** teaching women: **Titus 2**
- **Pastors** developing other leaders: **2 Timothy 2:2**
 - **Operation World Updates:**
 - o Papua New Guinea: “Leadership training is a top priority.”
 - o Moldova: “Leadership training and discipleship are still the greatest needs.”
 - o Mongolia: “Developing Mongolian church leaders is a strategic need and the key to strengthening the Church.”
 - o Mozambique: “Training church leadership is an urgent priority, probably the most strategic spiritual issue in the country.”
 - o **There are thousands of people and churches that need training. Some of you need to give your whole life to this task.**
 - o **My friend Joel also models this 2 Timothy 2:2...** When I first met him in Kiev in 2006, he said, “This is the most meaningful ministry of my life.”
- **Preaching/Equipping** to a congregation: **2 Timothy 4:2; Eph 4:11-12ff.**
 - People say you can't plant a church if you teach the Bible in depth.
 - They say you can't grow a church if you practice biblical church membership and discipline.
 - **Our goal isn't to build a crowd, but to build a church – to build a community of disciples.**
 - **We're not after attendance; but allegiance.**
- **To one another in the congregation: Colossians 3:16a; Romans 15:14b**

- Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom (Col 3:16)
- I myself am satisfied about you, my brothers, that you yourselves are full of goodness, filled with all knowledge and able to instruct one another (Rom 15:14)
- **Taking people one on one: Many examples of this**
 - **Barnabas and Paul (Acts 9:27)**
 - **Paul and Onesimus** (a runaway slave who became a Christian through Paul; Paul disciplined him, counted him as a brother and sent him back to Philemon, appealing to him to show mercy)
 - **Many of you disciple one-on-one**
 - **Scott Sauls was in seminary preparing to pastor, interviewed for an internship and said he was willing to do anything, except work with children. Pastor came back two days later and said, “We’ve talked it over. We’ve decided to assign you to the children’s ministry!” Scott talks about what a transforming experience that was.**
 - **Don’t minimize the importance of that work!**

While it is most certainly true that God has gifted some in the church with a unique ability to teach and preach (Eph 4:11; Rom 12:7; 1 Pet 4:10-11; Heb 13:7; 1 Tim 3:1-7; Ti 1:5-9), **all believers share this responsibility in different ways.**

If you are disciple of Christ, then you should listen to sermons, not merely as a **“receiver”** but as a **“reproducer.”**

- **Bill Hull: “I’m not going to test you... You go re-teach it and then I’ll test them!”**

When you study the Bible, do not merely study for information sake, but study to know God personally and deeply, and study that you may instruct others.

Teaching! Teaching! Teaching!

- **We need to saturate the nations with sound doctrine!**
- **We need to fill cities with teaching!**
- **We talk a lot about poverty relief, and rightly so.**
But we must also be about **“theological famine relief”**

“Without sound teaching, believers remain spiritual children. And children are vulnerable”

You don’t have to be behind a pulpit to disciple people.

- **3 Ways to Teach: Golf clubs**
- **This is what Jesus did – all three clubs...**

This GC is not relegated to a select few, but something for which every Christian should be part of.

This is not for the “missions department.” The church is the missions department.

#3: The Comfort We Enjoy (28:20b)

The King loves us.

This commission ends not with the command, but with a **comfort.**

“In his presence is fullness of joy...” (Ps 16)

G. Campbell Morgan read all of Matt 28 to a dying saint; he said, "That's a great promise isn't it?" She said, "No, that's a great *fact!*" He IS with us.

We have his personal presence and his perpetual presence (always)

Church Discipline – I am with you when you gather! (Matt 18:20)

Church's Mission – I am with you as you go! (Matt 28:20)

He is not only sovereign over us; He is present in us.

He is with us

- Here's another divine claim: omnipresence (**Psalm 46**)
- **Immanuel - will be with us every step of the way.**
- **I am with you always** reminds us of the great promises to saints like Moses (Exod. 3:12) and Joshua (Josh. 1:5).
- **Acts** – before Sanhedrin, angry mobs, rulers, and more – he was with them.

Piper: "I have total rights over all the peoples – everybody you ever will talk to – I have a right of ownership, and redemption to their souls. And no matter how they respond to you, or what they do to you, I will be with you. I, who loved you and gave myself for you – I, who chose you for myself and called you and sent you – I will *always* be with you. This promise holds till this mission is finished on the earth."

My friends, he is with us.

- We don't do this work alone.
- **It's like bring-your-kid-to-work day – and we're the kids.**
- He is with us.

Colossians 1:28-29

²⁸ Him we proclaim, warning everyone and teaching everyone with all wisdom, that we may present everyone mature in Christ. ²⁹ For this I toil, struggling with all his energy that he powerfully works within me.

David Livingstone once commented on all the work that Charles Spurgeon would do in a typical day (and Livingstone was no sluggard!). He asked Spurgeon how he could do it all. Spurgeon said, "You have forgotten, there are two of us."

Christ is in us! He is with us always – even to the end of the age.

The sweep of this commission great – displayed in the **four "alls."**

They show us why this Commission is So Great!

- **The Greatest Authority** - Jesus has "all" **authority**
- **The Greatest Mission Field** - Go Make disciples of "all **nations**"
- **The Greatest Curriculum** – Teach "all" that **He has commanded**
- **The Greatest Assurance** – He is with us – for "all" **our days.**

Here is a mission worth giving your life to!

Before you think you're unfit for this assignment – that this is not for you - just pause for a minute and consider who preserved the Great Commission for us!

Matthew!

- **A hated, despised, crooked, Tax Collector.**
- **Like a mafia member.**
- **Jesus transformed him. He said in Matthew 9:9, "Follow Me." And he did!**
- **Jesus can transform you.**
- **When people were upset that Jesus was hanging with him, he said, "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick... I came not to call the (self) righteous, but sinners." (9:12)**
- **People like us.**
- **Jesus makes sinners his disciples; who go and make more disciples.**

Every believer can mature as Matthew did.

- **He matured so well, he could pass Jesus' words through this Gospel.**
- **I'm not saying you'll write the Bible – please don't!**
- **But you can communicate His Word to others.**

Jesus made Matthew a disciple-maker, and He can make you one also.

The words and presence of Jesus changed this man.

He can change you too.