

The Great Commission

God's Plane

By Dr. Jeff Meyers

Bible Text: Matthew 28:18-20

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I do want to encourage you this morning to open your Bibles to the book of Matthew, chapter 28. The first book of the New Testament, the book of Matthew, the very last chapter, in fact, the very last couple of verses, Matthew chapter 28. And it is usually and typically at this point in the service that I make a reference to our first time guests and visitors. And what I try to do is I try to bring you up to speed on where we are in a message series or in a sermon series, because often times they will last months at a time. So, if this is your first time here you may feel somewhat lost and I try to do kind of a summary. But rather than addressing first time guests and visitors, allow me to address regular attenders and members.

You thought we were done with Matthew, didn't you? We have been in Matthew this entire calendar year. And you thought that Easter was the climax. I mean, after all, the tomb is empty. He is raised from the dead. We saw that. We experienced that last week and many of you, if not most of you, thought, ok, week after Easter we are going to go somewhere other than Matthew, because we have been there all this calendar year.

Today as we come to Matthew chapter 28 I will promise you that this is the last time we will be in Matthew. With that being said, when it comes to Easter, I think there is an easy, fall back or an easy mechanism to see Easter as simply a period or an exclamation point. Now don't get me wrong. He rose from the dead, period. He is risen. He is risen, indeed, exclamation point. And when it comes to syntax and the English language we use those dots and those periods and those commas and other things to indicate the tone and the vibe and the feeling of the passage. And, yes, he is risen from the dead. Yes, the tomb is empty. But please understand, when it comes to God's plan for humanity, the cross is not a period. The cross is a dash. And a dash simply exists to connect one entity to another.

Beginning with the Garden of Eden when humanity fell into sin, it was prophesied of old that a Messiah would come up through Abram, who had said that his seed would be blessed to all nations, even King David who said in Psalms 110 that all people one day would worship the Lord. And there is his incarnation, what we studied in Matthew, his incarnation, his birth, his life, his ministry, his teaching, his miracles, his death, his resurrection are all leading to the dash of what Jesus did not simply end, but what he began.

You and I, 2000 years later are the beneficiaries of what has taken place since the tomb was empty, and has taken place since he rose from the dead. For with his rising it was not "over." It had truly just begun: the Church of Jesus Christ, the body of Christ being instituted and established. It is a day when we come to Matthew chapter 28, and we see the marching orders. We see Jesus Christ's words to his disciples, his followers, the same words that we need to heed today. What do we do with an empty tomb? What do we do

with the risen Savior? We celebrate that it is empty and it is great that he arose, but what is the next step? What do we do? And what we are going to see today is that God has a very specific plan for your life. He has a very specific plan for your family's life. He has a specific plan for a local church's life, and in the broad spectrum, he has a plan for what we know as the Church of Jesus Christ. God has a plan and here is what it is. Are you ready? We put it on t-shirts. We put it on signs and we put it on posters. His plan is to change the world. That is his plan. When Jesus Christ was born in that manger, lived a sinless life, died on the cross and rose from the dead, it was so that the world might be, could be and would be changed through those who believe in him.

So today we look at Matthew chapter 28 beginning in verse 18, a passage of Scripture that is most commonly known as The Great Commission. But it is really God's plan for changing the world. Beginning in verse 18 of Matthew chapter 28 it says:

And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. Amen.¹

It is a very simple instruction manual. It is a very simple directive that we, the believers in Jesus Christ as Jesus' audience in Matthew chapter 28, are to go and to teach and to baptize in his name to all of the world. We are to be the mechanism. We are going to be the means. We are going to be the marchers, those who will change the world starting wherever we might be. So when we look at God's plan for changing the world, we can break it down into a few subtitles, so to speak. The first thing we see in Matthew 28 is this, that God's plan is proactive. It is not reactive. It is not, well if it occurs, so be it or we will just stay here and if things happen as we hope they will happen. No, no. What does he say? Go. Go is a proactive, get with it, get moving kind of word. Jesus is very proactive in his plan for your life and our lives. He says, "You are to go and to teach all, baptizing them in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit: and, lo, I am with you to the end of the age." It is proactive. And we see that it is proactive in two means. The first one is this, that it is directional. What I mean by directional is they were to leave the place where they were gathered and to go outside of the walls to do the ministry that Jesus called them to do. Now this is the pattern that we see in the early Church.

In fact, in the book of Acts, we see two things occur that we see emulated in our day. We see going and telling and coming and seeing. Unfortunately, you and I today live in a culture and in a society that believes for some reason that we must choose between either/or when really the answer is both/and. Allow me to share with you the book of Acts chapter 20, verse 20. The apostle Paul has been at Thessalonica and has been in Iconium. He has been all over Asia Minor and he says, "Do you not remember that I taught you publickly and from house to house?"

Even the apostle Paul said, "You know, there are times where we gather together." And

¹ Matthew 28:18-20.

you see in the book of Acts that he would go into a new community or a new city and for weeks he would meet them in the synagogues, basically a Jewish Church. And he would gather on their worship day and he would reason with them from the Scriptures. And he would go to the Athenians and he would meet them on Mars' Hill. And there would be times where they had a "worship service." But what you really see happening in the book of Acts, what you really see happening in the early Church is that God changing the world took place more outside of the church service than inside of the Church service.

And I know this is a constant that often times in our culture is formed, but allow me to give you some statistics. Do you realize that roughly only three percent of people who come to a saving knowledge and understanding of Jesus Christ do so in a Sunday morning worship service? Roughly three percent. That tells me that for every person, boy, girl, man or woman who comes to understand that they are a sinner in need of saving that Jesus Christ is the only answer, that the overwhelming majority of them realize that and make that decision outside of a service such as you and I are in today.

Now I do understand that we gather and Hebrews says don't forsake the gathering of the believers. And I do believe that we are to gather on a regular basis and to encourage and to fellowship and to worship and to study, but God's plan is for us to go to the nations and see them changed. And for that to happen, because they will not naturally just show up on Sunday morning, we have got to go to them. If you do not believe the statistic, allow me to give you another one. One hundred percent of the Meyers' family was saved outside of a church service. I personally when I made that decision for Jesus as my personal Savior was sitting in an office. Now it was on Sunday morning and it was in the pastor's office, but it wasn't during the worship service. My wife was saved in the back seat of her parents' car. My oldest son Marshall was saved on a weekday at the offices of the church. My middle son George was in a hallway and J. J. was in his bedroom. Not one of us in our immediate family, not one of us was saved during a "worship service."

Now every one of us at one point during the worship service walked down an aisle. Every one of us proclaimed it publicly. Every one of us went to the baptistry to tell the world that we are now bought and saved by the blood of Jesus Christ alone. But understand that if it were not for parents and if it were not for caring people who were willing to share the message of Jesus outside of this selected time, the Meyers family and 97 percent of you would be in a world of hurt. If we want to see the world change starting here, God's plan is proactive. It is directional. It is more outside these walls than inside.

But we also see that it is dimensional. Notice what the Bible makes it very clear. "Go ye therefore, and teach all nations."²

Now if you are a first time guest or visitor with us, allow me just some amusement here, ok? This is a trite thing that I enjoy doing, but First Baptist folks, you know and I understand that the original, what we know as the manuscripts of the Bible were written in Greek, but we read it and study it in English. Everybody help me here. What is the Greek word for all? All - not most, not a good percentage. When he said you are to go

² Matthew 28:18.

unto all the nations, Jesus meant exactly what Jesus said. It meant that we are to proactively go to any and all who do not know and who need to hear the name of Jesus.

Now let me start globally and I will work it down more to your local area. That means that there are people on this planet that we have a hard time loving and respecting that need Jesus as much as you do. Islamic terrorists need Jesus. North Koreans need Jesus. Those whom we would claim, as far as our country is concerned, to be the enemy; those whom we would claim to be on the opposite side of our directives.

Please understand, and we will get to this at the end of the message. We should not expect their behavior to change. Folks, you cannot clean the fish until you catch it. You can't clean it until you catch it. We get frustrated and we get upset about how the world is acting. Folks, they are just acting like dirty fish. And until Jesus catches them, we cannot expect them to be "clean." When he says all nations that means people we like, people we don't like, people that we have a certain attitude for and or against. It literally means all.

But let's work it back into our neighborhood and our culture and where we live and we work. Some years ago I had a young man in a church I was serving in who spent the majority of his summers during college doing what we know as summer missions. Basically, he would get out in May and he would be assigned to a location in the world that he, as a young college student with lots of energy and passion would be sent, literally, globally to assist either our NAMB missionaries here, or our IMB missionaries there. Well, one year, he had the blessing of being sent to Africa.

Now, I know that some of you as parents go, wow, I don't know if that is a blessing. He absolutely loved it. He was paired up with another young man and they were put on bicycles and motorcycles and the missionaries of Africa gave them a path to drive to down and say, "Go down there. Tell us who are living there, what they are doing and who is visiting there." He spent the entire summer literally just out on the back side of Africa living life and having a ball. He came back. He was so excited. What he saw, I mean, he had ministered like he had never ministered before here in the States. He goes back to school, comes through the next year. In May he gets assigned to southern California. Not near as exotic as Africa, but you just put your name in the hat and they send you where they believe you need to go. He wasn't there long when I received communication from him that he was frustrated. He was upset. He was bothered. Why? Because they had placed him in a home.

Now, remember, he thought he was going on the mission field. The home was in excess of 7000 square feet and worth millions of dollars. The family that was housing him for the summer gave him a car to use during the summer that was nicer than any car any of his family had back home. He spent the majority of his time at country clubs, swimming pools and parties. And he said, "I thought I was here to do missions. What is this?" And he started talking about the materialism and the carnality and all this stuff of southern California."

Ninety days come and go. He came back to our church and was to give somewhat of a presentation and he said, "Jeff, this year I don't think I am going to bring pictures like I did from Africa. I don't think I am going to bring videos. In fact, I don't think I am even going to speak long at all."

I said, "Sure. You do what you need to do."

And he got up and he shared with us how it was luxurious and opulent and about the environment that he was in. And he said, "But do you know what? Over the last 90 days God showed me something I didn't see 90 days ago. Rich people need Jesus, too."

You know, often times we get in a trap of thinking, well, they have got life all together. They can live without Jesus. No, they can't. And it doesn't matter if it is a neighbor, a coworker, someone who is higher on the scale, lower on the scale, someone who is a shade darker or a shade lighter. It doesn't matter. Simply put the dimensions. When Jesus said, "This is my plan for you to go to all the nations," he meant all the nations, whether it is one that we respect or don't respect, like or don't like, are comfortable with or not. This is his proactive plan.

The second stage we see in Matthew 28 is this, that it is very personal. Look at the second word in verse 19. Go ye. Let me tell you what ye means. You and me. It is the plural word which simply means every person who has come to a saving faith and knowledge in Jesus Christ is being spoken to in light of this passage. We do not have the privilege of saying God's plan is for certain people and not others. But we have gotten really bad at doing that. In fact -and I will share with you at the end - one of the reasons I think we have gotten ourselves in such a mess is that we have said that the sharing of the gospel and the plan of Jesus is for some folks, but not for others.

So how is God's plan personal? I think the first thing that we need to deal with is what I call division. We are great as humanity at dividing. It is us and them. And has anybody ever figured out who the proverbial "they" are? You know, "they say." It is us and them and what we have done even in Christian circles is we have caught ourselves in a really bad trap of saying there are certain people that God uses to fulfill his plan and a lot of people that he does not.

Let me remind you. In the book of Revelation 2:6 there is a church by the name of Ephesus. It is a church that is doing great. They believe great. Everything is wonderful. In verse 6 God makes this statement about one of the things that they do that is so good. He says, "You hate the deeds of the Nicolaitans which even I hate." The Nicolaitans were a group of people who stated that the clergy, the ministers, the pastors, the bishops, whatever title you want to give them, that they were to have the power, they were to have the authority. And unless you were ordained and unless you were one of them you were simply a nobody, had no authority and no access to ministry at all. They created a chasm top down.

Very few, if any, of us have that perspective of Christianity. But how many of you have the reverse? That is the pastor's job. That is the staff's job. That is the deacon's job. Yeah, we would reach more people if they would do more. And what we have done is we have reversed this Nicolaitan concept to where we say those individuals, whoever they are, they are the ones who are to share. They are the ones who are to be the light. They are the ones to preach the Word. They, they, they, when what does Matthew 28 say? Ye. That means we, not they.

So we create this division and this division happens because we have a really bad habit of looking at distribution. Let me tell you what I mean by this word. When you became a born again believer in Jesus Christ, the Bible makes it very clear according to 1 Corinthians 6 that the Holy Spirit came and dwelled within you. A couple of chapters later in 1 Corinthians 12 it says that the Lord himself distributed and he gave gifts to any and all who would believe on his name.

If you study the spiritual gifts in 1 Corinthians 12 you will discover several things. Number one, none of you has all of them, but all of you have at least one of them. You have something. God has given you something supernatural, a means and a way to serve him in his body and as his kingdom. That being said, even here at First Baptist at our new member's class and even within some of our Sunday school classes, on a periodic and regular basis we administer a spiritual gifts inventory, or a spiritual gifts test. And what we do is ask a few questions to folks, just to get them to respond, just to help them to find out how God maybe has wired them, so to speak. And when you go into 1 Corinthians 12, you see the gifts listed. Some of you as life long Baptists it will make you uncomfortable because there is a thing called tongues and interpretation of tongues. Some of these things make you real comfortable like prophecies and healings. Like I am good with that. But they are all there. The point is this. If you go online or you go get a selection of these spiritual gifts tests often times these tests go outside the realm of Scripture and start communicating spiritual gifts that are not even listed.

Allow me to share with you an experience that happened in my life some years ago. As many of you know, for about six years of my life I was a vocational evangelist. For about six years I traveled over 200 nights a year, local church revivals, youth camps, Bible conferences, overseas crusades. I never was home, ok? One of the reasons Traci and I are still married. I came home.

That being said, all right, in the midst of that I was at a conference. Now here I am a vocational evangelist. I spend my life packing a suitcase, getting a car or a plane and telling people about Jesus. As a part of this conference they gave us a spiritual gift inventory and it told me I did not have the spiritual gift of evangelism. Can I tell you how disheartening that was? But the last time I read 1 Corinthians 12, that is not a gift. There is not the gift of evangelism as my dear late friend Roy Fish used to say. We do not have permission. We have been given a commission to share.

That being said, we begin to talk about the distribution. And say, "Well you know what? That is just not how God wired me."

Do you want to know why I was not told I had the gift of evangelism on that test? Because it asked questions like this. Do you feel at times inadequate in sharing your faith? Yes. Sometimes when you speak to somebody about Jesus, do you get scared? Yes. Are there times where you are nervous when you have the opportunity to share your faith with somebody? Yes. Just because you are nervous, fearful and scared doesn't mean we aren't to do so.

Listen. There is no spiritual gift of evangelism. There is no spiritual gift of sharing our faith. When Jesus says, "Go ye into all the world," you do understand that these were fishermen, typically marginal, if any education at all in their life, and Jesus said, "Guys, you are completely equipped to do what I need you to do." At no point did Jesus say, "Ok, guys there is going to be a group to come up and they are the ones to do it, or the ones of you that get this gift, you do it. The rest, I don't think so."

So not only is God's plan proactive. It is completely personal, which leads to the third and the final point. It is absolutely powerful. I want you to notice what verse 18 says. "All power is given unto me."³

Later in the book of Acts 1:8 the Lord Jesus would make this statement that they were to tarry or wait in Jerusalem until the Holy Spirit would come upon them. And when he came in power, that through the Holy Spirit they were to go to Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria and the uttermost parts of the earth. Do you know what that means? That means go to all and to every single person.

And so that being said, what Jesus said is, "This is powerful. This can change lives. This can alter a community. This is the thing that will change the world like nothing else."

You may be thinking to yourself, well, we live in a world where it appears, at least in our culture, that the Christian community is going backwards. It might even appear that the Christian community is losing influence. In fact, you might even say that as you look around at the ethics of our culture and the morality of our culture, it appears that what we know as the Christian community is very quickly being ostracized, diminished and placed to the side. Guess what? You are absolutely correct. But we are in better shape than they were.

Let me share with you the first thing about the power of God's plan. It is a word you may or may not be familiar with. It is called demographics. It is the study of people. It is the study of how many live here, there and makes this and does what. Basically demographics is just a sociological, anthropological study of humanity. Demographics tell us how many people live in a certain area, what the average income is. Demographics tell us average education. Demographics tell us how many people are moving out and how many people are moving in. You are thinking, Jeff, what does this have to do with God's plan to reach the world?

³ Mathew 28:18.

Do you realize that in Matthew 28 there were probably 11 people listening to Jesus. Remember, Judas had gone by the wayside. It is possible that Matthias had been elected, so we might have 12. In fact, you could take a step back and say, "Whoa, time out." The book of Acts 1 says there were 120 people in the upper room. Could it be that Jesus was speaking to all 120? It is very possible. You could even take it a step further and say, "Well, no, time out." 1 Corinthians 15 says that on Jesus' resurrection upwards of 500 people saw him. Is it possible that this message was given to all 500? We don't know. But what I do know is let's work with the bigger number. Do you know how many people approximately live on planet earth in Jesus' day? Fifty million. Five hundred people saw him face to face. That means that the Christian community in this day in Matthew 28 was 0.00001 percent. And you thought we had a problem. You thought we were out numbered. You thought we were losing steam. In fact, let's take the demographics of the first century and overlay it with our century. We have approximately seven billion people on planet earth, not 7.1, but about seven billion people. Let's take the same percentage of believers. Let's just imagine that the Christian community of the 21st century had as much "fire power" as the Christian community of the first century. That would mean that on planet earth right now there would only be 70,000 born again believers in Jesus Christ. I dare say Atlanta, Georgia, has more than that.

In other words, we can gripe, whine, moan and complain about what we are seeing going on around us. But do you realize that 2000 years ago they did more with less? They did a lot more with a lot less. You say, "How did that happen?"

Because they didn't interject their own plans. They didn't come up with their own strategies. They just said, "Ok, let's do it the way Jesus said to do it. When the Holy Spirit leads you, open your mouth. Tell them about Jesus. See their life changed." End of story.

The rest of it literally is icing on the cake. The problem is our "Christian Community," has replaced cake with icing. Last time I checked I like icing. But after a couple of spoonfuls, oh, yeah. It is no substance, is it? It is the cake—as if that is any better for you. It is the cake that is the substance. But the demographics tell an important story.

Listen. When I watch the news every morning I am just as frustrated as you are. When I see that there are laws not in place that I believe should be. When I see that there are leaders who aren't acting the way that I would hope that they would, I am just as frustrated as you are. But you understand that we have got more laws, more leaders and more help than they ever thought about having 2000 years ago. And the last time I checked, every single one of us is a beneficiary of their faithfulness to God's plan. They simply prayed. The Holy Spirit showed up. Boom, 3000 people get saved. A couple of chapters later, 5000 people get saved without a human strategy, by simply being the people of God wherever their life took them. That is the demographics.

But what is the demonstration? What took place? What happened in this passage of Scripture? He says:

“Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you.”⁴

It was here in the first century. It was here in the early Church that we began to see this act that was very unusual to them and even unusual to our culture today, taking an individual who came to know Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior, placing them, for lack of better terms in a large body of water, taking their body, submerging it under the water and bringing it back up as a picture of their death, burial and resurrection in Jesus Christ. There is one thing, though, you would have to say about baptism. It is a very public demonstration. And if you were to be baptized in the first century and often as people are baptized in this century, when you did so, it was not necessarily well received by family members, coworkers or the community at large. In fact, over the course of what we know as the Church of Jesus Christ, more people have been martyred over public baptism than anything else. Why? Because you can argue. You can dispute. You can talk about the things of God. But nothing can demonstrate the power of God to anybody else more than the power of a transformed, changed life. And that is what was happening. Whether it was the eunuch in Acts 8 or the Gentiles and Cornelius in Acts 10, when those individuals professed Jesus Christ as their Savior and were willing to go down in that water and come back up, it demonstrated to the world their life was going to look, sound and be different.

You know, often times in a culture such as Sunday morning worship, I think we forget the power of this demonstration. You know, it has been said that within three to five years of someone being saved that they don't have any more lost friends. The best time to reach the lost world is right after you get saved. And a couple of years ago I had an individual who was pastoring a church who shared this story with me. I was living in the community so I was kind of tangent to it, but I wasn't directly a part of it.

There was a man in this church in his early 40s who got saved. He had been known, pretty much, as a ruthless businessman and was reckless in his private life. All that being said he had no family members, no friends, and no coworkers that were believers in Jesus Christ. And the day that he got saved he realized that there was a mission field all around him. So he talked with my friend. He said, “I know I need to be baptized. I know that.” He said, “But can I be baptized anywhere other than the church?” And the pastor said, “Well, what do you mean?”

He said, “Well, my wife is throwing me a big birthday party in a couple of weeks at the house.” He was a very successful man. He said, “We have a big back yard and a big pool.” “Do you think it would be ok if you were to baptize me at my house so all my friends would know what has happened in my life?”

Can I just tell you to a Baptist pastor that is sic-em to a bull dog. My friend thought, oh yeah, we can make that happen. So my friend goes and he made a big deal about this party. He wrote on the invitation “no gifts,” none of that. There came a time during the

⁴ Matthew 28:19-20.

festivities when they had got everybody's attention. He said, "I know you have come for my birthday party and I have told you not to bring any gifts, but I am going to ask you for one gift. I am going to ask for the next three or four minutes that nobody says a word. Nobody laughs. Nobody mocks. Nobody verbalizes anything for three to four minutes. As my friends and coworkers, would you give me absolute silence and attention?"

At that point he called my friend over. They made their way into the shallow end of his swimming pool and he professed his faith in Jesus Christ and was baptized on the spot.

Now can I tell you or can I show you according to my friend what people looked like at that party? For those of you listening on the internet, forgive me. You can't see this. Are you all ready?

Let me ask you a question. How many of those 40 plus friends upon the invitation of any of you would have come to an Easter service? How many of those coworkers with all of the creativity and all of the things that we could conjure up would actually darken the doors on a Sunday morning?

Let me tell you what this young brand-new believer understood. He understood that Jesus had changed his life. And he needed to change his family's life. He needed to change his coworkers' life. He needed to change his friends' life. So rather than relegating they will just show up to me one day, I am going to go to them. It is not the preacher's job. It is not my friend's job. It is my responsibility. I am going to go to them and I am going to demonstrate why I don't sound the way I used to sound. I am going to demonstrate why I don't tell the jokes I used to tell. I am going to demonstrate why my priorities are different than they used to be. And you cannot exchange the power of a changed life in the gospel of Jesus Christ. In just a moment, one of the best ways will be demonstrated to us when we publicly demonstrate our faith with what we simply know as baptism.

You know I have had the privilege of baptizing so many people over the years. Do you know what one of the great things about it is? Family and friends always come to watch. Why? Because they want to see what is this all about.