

The Great Commission

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Today I wanted to share with you a passage that has been on my mind, which for reasons I won't belabor but will be obvious to you, I want you to turn in your Bibles to the Gospel of Matthew, the end of the Gospel of Matthew, chapter 28. Matthew 28. We're going to look at what is called the Great Commission in Matthew 28:16 through 20. These are Jesus' parting instructions to his disciples before he ascended to heaven after completing his work of redemption on our behalf and these are words that should ring in the ears of the church until Christ returns again to earth, and when you see the majestic nature of this passage, you can see why it's called the Great Commission. It is truly great beyond our ability to express it.

Let me read verses 16 through 20 and then we'll dive into the passage here this morning. Matthew 28:16 through 20.

16 But the eleven disciples proceeded to Galilee, to the mountain which Jesus had designated. 17 When they saw Him, they worshiped Him; but some were doubtful. 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."

As we come to this passage, we have come to the end of Matthew's Gospel. Jesus throughout the prior 28 chapters had established the reality of his deity with the signs and wonders and authoritative teaching that he had given to Israel in those days and now he had been crucified, now he had been raised from the dead. The spectacular life and ministry of Jesus had come to its conclusion and it was time for him soon to return to heaven and the question is what would be the conclusion of this Gospel? What would Jesus' parting words be? What would be the climax of the Gospel? What would Jesus leave ringing in the ears of his disciples as he left their physical presence? Well, Matthew's Gospel ends with this famous passage known as the Great Commission.

Listen, do not be fooled by the brevity of this passage. This passage is so packed with such amazing words from the lips of our Lord: it speaks to the order of the universe; it

subjects all nations to its authority; it maps the mission of the church; it impacts the believer with the authority of Christ; it expresses the power by which this command would be carried out; and it is Jesus' personal promise to his disciples to be with them as they go forth in obedience to him. This is a passage of colossal significance, of colossal content, of colossal impact, and we're just going to be able to bounce on the tops of the waves here this morning looking at three vital aspects of the Great Commission that must affect our lives today, that impact the church, that should always be at the forefront of the thinking of church leaders throughout the world, that this is what we are about. That we are not about entertainment and seeking the approval of the world. We're not about seeking to influence American political process. Jesus here gives us and defines for us what the mission of the church must be and by implication, gives instruction to the leadership of his church from generation to generation as to what the call must be. It is an unchanging call because we serve an unchanging Christ.

I just want to structure this around three aspects of the Great Commission here and the first aspect that really impresses you as you look at this passage is, first of all, the authority of Christ. The authority of Christ and ideally you would read this passage at the end of having read through the Gospel in one sitting in order to have it fully impact you. But Jesus sets forth his authority and premises his command on his authority.

Look at verse 18 with me here and we're going to skip over a few things just for the sake of time. Verse 18, "And Jesus came up and spoke to them," spoke to the 11 disciples, "saying, 'All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth.'" Jesus draws attention to himself. He draws attention to his authority. Now, the word "authority" refers to the right or the prerogative and the corresponding power to accomplish and enforce your will. Jesus has the power to bring to pass whatever he desires and his ministry verified the claim. All of the Gospel of Matthew undergirds what is written there in verse 18 when Jesus said, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth." Well, if you read through the Gospel of Matthew, you realize that as magnificent of a claim as that is, it is utterly incontestable that what Jesus said is true. Jesus had spent his earthly life and specifically the last three years of his life in public ministry, establishing the veracity of that claim.

Think about it with me. I won't refer to the passages that undergird this. I have them documented here in my notes. Jesus established his authority in his teaching. People who heard him speak said, "Never before has a man spoken like this man speaks," and they were stunned at the authority with which he taught. Jesus had authority over human disease. He had authority over demons. When he commanded them to depart, they left. Jesus had authority over nature. When a raging sea is in front of him he says, "Hush, be still," and the waves turn to glass. He has authority to forgive sins. He told the paralytic, "My son, your sins are forgiven to you." He has authority to raise the dead and he did. He has authority over blindness, to heal a man born blind and restore sight to one who had never seen during his adult life or his life as a child either. He has authority to loosen mute tongues. He has authority over the temple of God. He has authority over the judgment of men. He has authority over his own life to lay it down voluntarily. He has authority over eternal life as it is expressed in the Gospel of John 17. All of those points

really deserve to be gone through carefully one by one, but I simply give that to you as a little bit of an overview to impress upon your mind in the short time that we have here that in multiple multiple ways the Scriptures refer to us and show to us and record to us under the powerful inspired Scriptures written by the Holy Spirit through the human agents of his choosing, that Jesus has authority over all of existence. The heavens and the earth bow before this great King. Jesus has infinite might to accomplish whatever he desires to do.

And the thing that I would impress upon you by way of contrast, by way of seeking to bring the weight of that authority to bear on your own mind and conscience, is to realize by comparison you have none of that authority. You have none of that capacity at all. You don't have authority over human disease to heal it at your spoken word. Demons don't respond to you. You don't have authority to stop the wind from blowing. You don't have authority to forgive sin. You don't have authority to raise the dead. You can't heal a blind man. You can't open a mute tongue. You have no authority over the judgment of men. You don't have authority over when you live and die. Wow, by comparison, Christ, we quickly realize how much we are nothing in his sight and in his presence. Circumstances continually hinder our purposes, what we set out to do. Nothing hinders the purpose of Christ. What he commands comes to pass.

He had proven it in his ministry and remember this, that when Jesus spoke these words in Matthew 28:18, he was standing there as the resurrected Christ. He had been dead, he had been buried, and now he stands before them alive. A crucified man now standing there alive. The resurrection was the crowning proof of his authority. Even death itself could not hold him in prison. The final realm of authority had been conquered. He entered into the realm of death and emerged the victor. This is the Christ who gives the Great Commission. Jesus rules over all and he appeals to that authority as he now speaks to the early pillars of the church.

One little other thing. I'm concerned to impress this upon you. Without doubt, we are just too familiar with some of these things and we have too easy of an existence alongside the great matchless authority of Christ and I'm concerned for us to grasp that in some measure this morning and have some sense of fear that would flow from that. Turn back to the book of Revelation 1:12. You see, we should not read the Great Commission without trembling before it. We should not read the Great Commission without being profoundly impacted by it; to think that the resurrected Lord whom we claim as Lord and Savior speaks and commands here should have an impact on us. It should change the way we think, change the way that we feel, change what we do.

Jesus in Revelation 1:12, John is speaking here and he said, "I turned to see the voice that was speaking with me. And having turned I saw seven golden lampstands; and in the middle of the lampstands I saw one like a son of man, clothed in a robe reaching to the feet, and girded across His chest with a golden sash. His head and His hair were white like white wool, like snow; and His eyes were like a flame of fire. His feet were like burnished bronze, when it has been made to glow in a furnace, and His voice was like the sound of many waters. In His right hand He held seven stars, and out of His mouth came

a sharp two-edged sword; and His face was like the sun shining in its strength." So if you picture looking up into the sun while you are standing next to a majestic powerful waterfall, you have a sense of the overwhelming power and glory that John was seeing as he describes this. And what was his response? Verse 17, this is my whole point in coming to this passage, "When I saw Him, I fell at His feet like a dead man. And He placed His right hand on me, saying, 'Do not be afraid; I am the first and the last, and the living One; and I was dead, and behold, I am alive forevermore, and I have the keys of death and of Hades.'" The presence of Christ stunned him. It took Christ extending grace and mercy for him to stand up in his presence, but when he saw the glory of Christ, he fell down in utter fear because he was so overwhelmed by the majestic nature of Christ.

What I want you to see in all of this, in this recitation of the different realms of his authority, this illustration from Revelation, these words from Matthew 28, is that when Jesus said, "All authority has been given to Me," he was making an incontestable statement. He had established his authority in every way possible beyond question and now he speaks to the apostles as the representatives of the church, those founding pillars of the church, and he says, "Go and make disciples."

Beloved, we must respect and honor and glorify the authority of the Lord Jesus Christ not only because of what he did in the past, not only because we should have a heart of gratitude for what he has done in our lives now, but also to remember that there is a coming day when all of us who know Christ will stand before him at his judgment seat. 2 Corinthians 5 speaks of this. Romans 14 speaks of this. We are going to stand before Christ and he will evaluate how we have lived our lives and honor and reward us accordingly.

The authority of Christ spans both existence before your birth and expands what your existence will be going forward into all of eternity. We must bow before that authority. We must honor that authority. We must obey that authority with a sense of holy fear, of holy awe, that Jesus Christ was not bluffing when he said this. Out of the greatness of the authority of who he is and all of the displays of that authority throughout his life, he speaks and gives an imperative to the church and it is incumbent upon us who know him to respond with our life obedience. That is what Christians do. It transcends what Jesus can do for us to help us in life, although he graciously does that and we're all grateful beneficiaries of that. We have to see that we serve as part of a greater commission that the Lord has given to the church. We have responsibility in responding to the authority of Christ and we will be held accountable for how we respond. That's of awesome consequence and it is a privilege for you to be at a church that seeks to honor that, that seeks to send men like Jeremy Smith out into the field so that this work of Christ can be advanced. But we all have to look at this and say, "Where do I fit into this? Where do I respond as part of the greater collective of the church of Christ?"

Look at verse 18 with me again. Jesus says, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth." That pretty well covers the realm of existence, doesn't it? The government of the universe belongs to the risen Lord. With utter simplicity, with utter clarity, Jesus Christ declares the first part of the Great Commission which is that it is

based on his illimitable, inexhaustible, comprehensive authority and we all, we all stand, as it were, beneath that authority and have the responsibility to respond and obey. And beloved, I just believe that that has to provoke a sense of holy reverential fear in our hearts; that this is of great consequence, and the authority of Christ should be the defining, animating, motivating factor in life no matter where you are picking up in the progress of your own life to say, "This is where it starts. I must respond to the authority of the resurrected Christ." That's the ground of the Great Commission.

Now secondly, having established his authority, secondly we see the command of Christ. The command of Christ. What is it that the church is to be engaged in? What is it that these 11 men were hearing? There may have been others around but Jesus was primarily targeting the apostles here. Verse 19, he says, "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them," verse 20, "to observe all that I commanded you." Now, he said a mouthful there but what I want you to see here in verse 19, this is really crucial in seeing the progress of thought here in this passage. Look at verse 19 at the very start, Jesus says, "Go therefore." What is the connection between what proceeded and what follows? As it's often said, you've heard many preachers say this, what is the "therefore" there for? What is the connection between what he had just said with what he is about to do? What is the hinge, in other words, between his authority and what follows? Well, what I want you to see is that the command to make disciples flows from Jesus' authority. He rules over all and he gives this broad command, he goes from his unlimited authority to give rise and to command a universal mission to his church.

When he says, "Go and make disciples," that command which is the heartbeat of the church, is premised on that great authority that we just saw. On a grammatical level, the real command here is, "make disciples." That is the core central command. The going, the baptizing and the teaching are all subsidiary points that show how disciples are to be made. Going is an implicit part of making disciples. Jesus sends us forth. He sends us out. The blessings that we have received in salvation are meant to be shared, not hoarded. We are not to hide in our closet permanently and never go out and make the glories of this resurrected Christ known. We go out and declare his authority. We go out and declare his supremacy. We go out and declare his saving work to men who would otherwise perish in perdition if they never heard the message. This is what Christ commands us to do. We are not given a menu of options to choose from.

The church is called to make disciples. To make disciples means that we go out and we bring people into a submissive relationship with Christ in which the person, the man or woman or child, learns from Christ, accepts his authority and obeys his commands. What we go out and do is we make disciples. Having received this command from the authority of Christ, we go out and declare that authority to others so those who are rebels against him would come to submit their hearts and lives to him. Jesus issues the command from this overflowing infinite authority and we in response go out and declare his authority. You and I who are disciples, in other words, are to be his instruments in making more disciples. We make Christ known so that others will follow him. We do that for his glory.

We do it out of love for the lost and we tell them that, "There is a crucified and risen Savior who alone can forgive your sins. Come to him lest you perish in perdition."

This is of great eternal consequence and what I want you to see, and I'll talk about this when I'm here in two weeks, is that there is a transcendent element to this. When you really step back and think about it, it really has a way of putting your own life and concerns into perspective. This transcends generations. This is what faithful Christians have been doing for generations before us. This is what we do now and this is what the mission will continue to be after we are gone. We are part of a greater mission. We are part of a greater plan. We are simply put here to be a part of the outworking of the plan of God in the short time of breath that he gives us, and we go where the doors are open and we honor Christ in obedience to him as we do that. Not everyone goes. Some people stay. How can they go unless they are sent? Paul said in Romans 10. Some people have to send, some people actually go. It's all part of the greater matrix of what Christ commands his church to do. So when a faithful man like Jeremy Smith comes and declares what's happening in his ministry, we all share a part of that because we are all a part of the sending but you must view your life, you must view the totality of your life from this perspective. And maybe your realm of disciples is only two or three, maybe it's just the young children that the Lord has given you at home, but there is a consciousness in your mind of extending the authority of Christ and seeing disciples made. Not being content while there is one knee that is left unbowed to this holy King.

The word "nations" here, "go and make disciples of all the nations," I mean, it's just staggering to look at this. It's just staggering to think about this. "Nations" here is the regular term used for Gentiles. The disciples by design and by Jesus' command had focused on the Jews, had focused on the Jews during Jesus' time on earth, but now Jesus expands the mission to every corner of the globe. There is no person left unaffected by this command. As a disciple of Christ, we go out and everyone else is under the authority of it also. His authority is over all.

And let me say something here at this point. There are people, well-meaning people, evangelical people, who go out of their way to tell you that you have to earn the right to be heard by building personal relationships with people before you speak the Gospel to them, before you share the Gospel with them. They say you have to have a right to be heard. Well, whatever you think about that, personally I don't think much of it, keep this in mind, I want you to understand something really really important: your authority to proclaim Christ to someone, let me say that again because I stumbled over my words there, your authority to proclaim Christ comes not from whether the person in front of you thinks you spent enough time and have established a relationship so that you have credibility as that person judges credibility. No, our authority to proclaim the Gospel comes from Christ himself. Christ says, "Go and make disciples. Go and teach them." That authority, that derivative authority that we have, is not contingent upon somebody giving it their verbal okay. The authority to proclaim the Gospel comes from Christ and we have to have that clear in our mind. We preach the Gospel because Christ told us to, not because a man in front of us says, "Okay, we're good enough friends now."

I'm not denying the place of relationships and all of that, but we just have to have it straight in our minds where comes from. If you have opportunity in an airport to speak the Gospel, speak the Gospel. Don't stand back and say, "Well, I haven't developed a friendship with this person." That's foolish in light of what Jesus said here in Matthew 28. Can you imagine standing before Christ at the judgment seat of Christ and saying, "Well, Lord, I held back because I didn't really know him." Well, come on! What's Christ going to say in response to that when you're standing before this one of shining, majestic, Shekinah glory? He said, "I told you to go. I told you to make disciples. Where does my authority fit into your matrix of thinking?" This passage is a rebuke to that man-centered approach to evangelism and I daresay that many in the Christian world have a lot of repenting to do for putting man at the center instead of the authority of Christ at the center. Jesus said, "Go and make disciples."

Now he says, "baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit." This is a wonderful clause by itself. Again, the grammar shows that baptism is a part of discipleship. This is to be an ongoing part of the life of the church. Baptism does not make you a Christian. No one was saved when they were baptized as an infant. No one was saved apart from true faith in Christ, but Jesus commands it for every believer as a public testimony to the reality of his salvation. We as a church, we as the church of Christ, administer baptism in fulfillment of this command. The question for some of you may be: have you been baptized since you came to saving faith in Christ? Have you given that kind of public testimony? Have you obeyed Christ in this most fundamental area? The one who has all authority is the one who commands baptism. You can't continue to put it off indefinitely. There comes a time where you have to say, "If I'm going to name the name of Christ, I'm going to obey him in baptism." It's really the first step in true obedience after you come to saving faith.

Now, this verse is Trinitarian in its nature; it speaks of the oneness of God. He says, "baptize them in the name," singular, and then he gives the three persons of the Trinity, identifying them separately with separate articles to show the distinction of persons within the one essence of God. He says, "baptizing them in the name," singular, "of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit." Thus each person of the Trinity is involved with this command. It's just staggering what this passage contains.

Then in verse 20 he says, "teaching them to observe all that I commanded you." Instruction is central to making disciples. We teach people the Bible. We teach them the doctrine of God. We teach them the doctrines of grace so that they would understand that salvation comes from the sovereign hand of God and that they would give glory and humble gratitude back in response to him, proper evidence of being truly born again.

Look, making disciples is about more than transmitting knowledge. I'm going somewhere with this. It's about more than transmitting knowledge, it is about transforming lives. It is not enough simply to convey information to someone and have them leave unchanged. The whole point is that there would be a heart response in the lives of our hearers where they conform themselves to the authority of Christ. We aren't looking for a quick profession of faith and unconcerned about what happens after that. Sometime you should

read the results, you should read Ian Murray's writings about the American church. The name is escaping me at the moment. I know that book so well but it's skipping my mind right now. But to see that the follow-up, if you examine some of the crusades that took place over the past 50 years and the follow-up was not the result that people became disciples. Oh, a lot of people came forward but did they become productive members of the church of God? No. And you evaluate the success of a spiritual enterprise in the name of Christ by whether someone becomes a disciple or not, not whether you get them forward on one night to give one prayer and then go on unchanged. This is so fundamental and when you understand that, it drives the way that you approach ministry. We patiently consistently teach the Scriptures over time so that lives are changed over time and people learn to obey Christ as a response. Such transformation is harder to quantify but it yields a more profound result.

I know there are many of you in the room like this, who are like me, there was a time where you professed to be a Christian when you weren't, right? And then you were truly saved, God truly moved on your heart. You truly repented and truly submitted your life to Christ. The change that flows out of that as you conformed your life to the Scriptures, that's the mark of a disciple, not the false professions that came beforehand. That has nothing to do with true Christianity.

And in terms of seeking that transformation, I just want to say this: you seminary students that are in here and those that may hear it in other means, you especially need to heed this aspect of the Great Commission. Over the years, over the 15 or 20 years that I have been here, I have heard so many seminary students say that their life objective was, "I want to write and teach." Okay, fair enough. That's okay as far as it goes but I'll tell you the truth, I lose sleep when I hear men talk that way when it's not accompanied by this kind of making disciples aspect that Jesus focuses on because too often it sounds like some of these students want to avoid people so that those people won't interfere with the student's brilliant articulation of truth. We are about making disciples. It's fine to write, it's fine to teach but you cannot divorce that from a heart desire to see lives transformed and disciples made because that's what Jesus commanded us to do. Say you put a string of books on a shelf with your name as author on them but you are aloof and cold to the people that are actually in the circle of your life, that's a serious disconnect that no serious Christian, no serious seminary student would ever be content to live with. A guy says, "I want to write and teach so that people would respond to Christ." That's a whole different thing. "I want to be alone so I can write." I don't see how you find that in this passage.

So Jesus said, look at verse 20 with me, "teaching them to observe all that I commanded you." All that I commanded you. This would include not only the teachings that Jesus recorded in the Gospels but also the Old Testament which Jesus affirmed throughout his ministry beginning in Genesis 1:1 and through all of the prophets. Jesus affirmed the Old Testament and therefore by his instruction put his imprimatur, put his affirmation on all of the Old Testament, and he said in Luke 24 that all that the law and the prophets and the Psalms, they all point to me, and so he gave his blessing to the totality of that. And then during his earthly ministry, he authorized the writing of the New Testament when he commissioned the apostles, that the Holy Spirit, John 15, would bring to remembrance all

that I said to you. So here you have a sweeping affirmation of what it is that we are to teach. It is in the Scriptures that we find the content of how we instruct men in order to bring them to be disciples of Christ. All of this expresses the command of our Lord Jesus Christ. All of this expresses his great and majestic authority and that progress of revelation over time. We explain that and we patiently teach people.

Look, beloved, people are born into sin. They are born into darkness. And in the culture that we have here, it's just descending into greater and greater banality and sinfulness, isn't it? All the more important for us not to step out of that stream of culture and to speak into it from a position of speaking authoritatively and teaching the authority of Christ and teaching what he commands in the Scriptures. That is the only way that we can stand against that flood of ungodliness that we live in the midst of. Nothing else will be satisfactory. Nothing else will be effective.

We've said how the authority of Christ provokes a reaction of fear. I want to suggest to you that this command of Christ provokes a reaction of love in our hearts individually. Think about it with me. First of all, Jesus said, "If you love me," what? "Keep my commandments," right? So as soon as we talk about the commandments of Christ, we are immediately drawn into a love response to it. You think about this Great Commission, you trace it back to the authority of Christ but, listen, I want you to think about this: flowing out of this Great Commission for generations, for 2,000 years since then, there has been a thread of faithful men who have continued to do that and you and I are on the receiving end of their faithfulness. Someone shared the Gospel with you in a book, in a sermon, in a personal setting. Somehow men who took this command seriously transmitted it down through generations until you were in a position to receive it and that message became the means by which God awoke you to your sin, awoke you to the authority of Christ, awoke you to the Gospel and you responded in repentance and faith to him. You look at the span of history on this and you can't help but love it; to realize that this came, the fountain of this goes back to this commission that Christ gave to his disciples at the end of Matthew 28 and you realize how greatly precious this is. I mean, the river that has delivered the Gospel to us in this life is really a river of blood. Men gave their lives for the sake of being faithful to this command of Christ.

So the blood of Christ and the blood of the martyrs and the faithfulness of those who loved you and shared the Gospel with you, many of whom are now in glory themselves, all of that adorns the greatness of this commission and should provoke within you a most humble gratitude and loving response that says, "I am so grateful to Christ who purchased my salvation with his life blood. I am so grateful to Christ who commanded this. I am so grateful to Christ who motivated the faithfulness of those who delivered this to me so that I might be saved from my own sin and disobedience and rebellion against a holy God." And when you get that, beloved, and it takes a while for it all to sink in, but you realize that you have received from the hands of those who went before you this great treasure, then you turn and look forward and say, "I have to do the same thing. I have to look at the circle of my relationships, my family, my friends, my opportunities. I've got to do the same thing. I am under moral imperative. I am compelled," you say to yourself. "I am compelled to do what all of those people did, most of whom I won't meet until I get to

heaven. I'm compelled to do what they did to extend this just one more generation and then I'll step aside and the Lord will call me home and it will continue on because the transcendent authority of Christ reigns over all of this." And beloved, beloved, you look at all of that and your affections should melt before it. When you realize the great precious treasure that is the Gospel and you realize all that we have discussed here, it should provoke within you, this command of Christ to go make disciples should provoke within you a response of unqualified unconditional love and devotion and affection to the Christ who is the source of that great fountain. That's what it means to be a Christian.

Thirdly. The authority of Christ, the command of Christ. Could anyone be more balanced and more pastoral than our Great Shepherd, the Lord Jesus Christ? No. No. No. No, he's the Great Shepherd. The third thing that you need to see here that should just provoke you to even greater love in your heart toward him is, thirdly, the promise of Christ. The promise of Christ. You read this and you just want to dive into the text and find yourself within the words of it. Verse 20, he said, "teaching them to observe all that I commanded you." He is done with the commission now and he ends with a promise. The Gospel of Matthew ends with this wonderful promise. He says, "lo," behold, take note, "I am with you always, even to the end of the age." Honestly, vocabulary doesn't exist to do justice to the grandeur of this. This resurrected Christ, this one who loves his church, this one who speaks with all authority, ends with a promise.

Look, Jesus was speaking to a group of men who were not influential, in fact they were a pretty ragtag bunch. It wasn't that long earlier where they had all left him and fled, Matthew tells us. When Christ was being led off to the Roman trials, they left. They ran. This was just a few weeks ago at most, and Christ tells them to go and make disciples? They weren't good disciples themselves and they ran from him and he is telling them to go and make disciples of all the nations? To go to Gentiles as well as Jews? Christ tells them to bring nations into an obedient relationship to him even though the nations had never heard his name? You're saying that to these men? Listen, that is utter insanity. That's absurd. These men couldn't carry their own water, let alone deliver water to someone else. It's insanity except when it is carried out in the authority and in the presence of Christ.

Remember, the one who gave this seemingly insane command is the same one who has authority over teaching and judgment and eternal life, this one who is resurrected and raised from the dead. Beloved, that one, that Lord Jesus Christ, he himself is the one who will personally attend their efforts to carry out his Great Commission and his presence will never fail. He said, "I will build my church and the gates of Hades will not prevail against it." You see, it's not in the power of those apostles at all. This all is premised on his authority and his promise to be with us as a church, to be with us as we go. You and I are no more competent than the 11 ragtag failures that were in front of him. What gives nobility and what ensures our success is the presence of this resurrected Christ with us as we go. Spurgeon said and I quote, "Since all power on earth is lodged in Christ's hands, he can also clothe any and all of his servants with a sacred might by which their hand shall be sufficient for them in their high calling." We hear the voice of Christ

commanding us, we remember his power, and we say, "Okay, based on what you said, dear Lord, we go forth."

Here's what I want you to see, beloved, speaking to all of us collectively, speaking as one myself under the authority of this word: Jesus – get this and this should just add another reason for you in your heart to love Christ – Jesus uses his authority not only to command us, he uses his authority to guarantee our success. He uses his authority to bless us. He is so wonderful and as he tells us to go and be an instrument in the conversion of sinners, he is commanding us to do that which is within the realm of his power and he says, "I promise you, I will be with you as you go." That is why the church does what it does. Christ has told us to and Christ has promised us success and that promise of the presence of Christ, "I am with you always," is precious to the individual believer, precious to you and me as well.

You see, the authority provokes fear, the command provokes love, this promise provokes trust. "Christ, you are with me always?" J. C. Ryle said this and I quote, he said, "Let all true Christians lay hold on these words, Christ is with us always. He is with us daily to pardon and forgive, with us daily to sanctify and strengthen, with us daily to defend and keep, with us daily to lead and to guide, with us in sorrow and with us in joy, with us in sickness and with us in health, with us in life and with us and death, with us in time and with us in eternity. Christ is with us." Ryle goes on and says, "Let us go on believing and not be afraid. It is everything to be a real Christian. None have such a king, such a priest, such a constant companion, and such an unfailing friend as the true servants of Christ."

Beloved, this is your Christ. This is the greatness of Christ. This is the glory and condescension of Christ, commanding us to go, promising to be with us as we do. This one who has all authority and sends you out is the same one who is your ever present help and friend. All we can do is love him, right? And if we love him, we obey him.

Pray with me if you would.

Lord Jesus, as we look at this passage that you have given to your church, it's such a mixture of fear and love and trust with which we respond to you. You are gracious. You are authoritative. You are Lord. You are King. You are prophet. You are priest. You are a Savior and a sympathetic high priest in heaven before us representing us before the Father. We are the beneficiaries of such profound grace and we thank you for that and we offer you collectively our humble obedience in response to what you have said here. Be with us today. Be with us in our lives as we go forth seeking to obey what you have commanded us to do. Attend our efforts collectively, all of us together, attend our efforts as we seek to make disciples in obedience to you.

And Lord Jesus, we thank you. We thank you for that long stream of generations of faithful men, faithful women, who shared the Gospel along the way and somehow, Father, you orchestrated all of that to deliver it to us and then drew us to Christ by your own power. We see in this passage that we are part of something that transcends generations, transcends our lives, that echoes from eternity past to eternity future and all

points in between. We are humbled to be your servants. We are grateful to be children of our heavenly Father.

And Lord, we honor you. We bless your holy majestic name. We pledge to you our obedience in response to this passage, not confident in our own strength but confident in your promise that the one who says you would be with us always will actually be faithful to do that even to the end of the age. And with that we rejoice, with that we bring glory to your name, with that we ask your blessing. In the wonderful, perfect, matchless, impeccable name of the Lord Jesus Christ we pray. Amen.

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