

# The Great Commission

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**Bible Text:** Matthew 28:18-20  
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Matthew 28:16 through 20 is our text for this morning and let me just read that with you, beginning in verse 16,

16 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."

Well, as you come to this passage and we haven't had the benefit of teaching through the Gospel of Matthew yet, we're kind of jumping in, parachuting in at the last passage here, but as you read through the Gospel of Matthew, you're coming to the conclusion of a tremendous account of the life of Jesus Christ. Jesus throughout the Gospel of Matthew had taught with authority, he had performed signs and wonders, and been crucified, buried and raised from the dead, all proving that he was the true King of Israel. He had proven himself with signs and wonders and now we are coming to the climax of this great Gospel. After this summary of his ministry, after the extensive discourses of his teaching, obviously Matthew was writing to build to a climax; he was writing to come to this point: what would the conclusion of this life be? What would the conclusion of this Gospel be? What would be the climax? Well, Matthew's Gospel ends with this famous passage known as the Great Commission.

Now, it took me maybe two minutes to read it at the most but I want to encourage you, do not be fooled by the brevity of this passage because when you look at this passage even in a most cursory way, you can see that this passage speaks to the order of the universe. It subjects all nations to its authority. It maps out the mission of the church universal, what the church throughout the world should be doing and by extension what we as a fellowship should be doing, it impacts every believer including you and me with the authority of Jesus Christ, and it expresses the power and the promises by which all of these things can be done. So whether you look into the heavens or whether you look on earth, whether you look out at unsaved people or you are within and looking at the

Disciples of Christ, whether you're going through trials or looking to serve Christ with your life, all of those things are brought under the umbrella of this great passage. This passage speaks even to the very nature of the Godhead itself as it speaks about the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. This is a magnificent passage is really my only point for right now.

We're going to focus on three vital parts to the Great Commission. It's called the Great Commission because it's what Christ commanded his disciples to go and do and we're going to look at three aspects of this Great Commission that are going to help us understand what the trajectory of Truth Community Fellowship should be, and I couldn't really overstate the importance of this passage to framing what it is that we're going to be about; what it is that we're going to set our heart affections on. This passage is going to be the prism through which we evaluate ministries in the future. This is going to be the prism through which we decide what we do and what we don't do and when we start to stray, whether it's individually or whether it's as a body, we find ourselves getting off track, we're going to come back here. We're going to come back to what Jesus said in this passage because it establishes for us a true plumb line by which we can build this church to be an effective witness for Christ.

Three aspects of it that we're going to look at and, first of all, I want to emphasize for you this morning, point 1: the authority of Christ. The authority of Christ. Look at verse 18 with me. It's so simple. It's so simple and straightforward and yet it is so deep and so profound. Look at verse 18 with me, "Jesus came up and spoke to them," spoke to the disciples, "saying, 'All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth.'" All authority. That word "authority" refers to "the right, the prerogative and the corresponding power to accomplish and enforce his will." Jesus, by virtue of being the eternal Son of God, has the right and the prerogative to rule over heaven and earth and he has the power to carry out his will. Nothing thwarts the decreed will of God. Nothing thwarts him from doing what he wants to do. Jesus has the power to bring to pass whatever he desires.

It has become far too common in evangelical circles to dummy Jesus down as if he were simply a buddy and a friend, as if he were someone familiar that you would go out fishing with, and to lose sight of the fact that he is the glorified Son of God who rules over heaven and earth. There must be, when we think of Christ, when you think of Christ in your life, what you think about Christ deep in your heart, there should be a sense of awe and reverence and even fear of him because he is the one who rules over heaven and earth. All authority belongs to him and there should be an element of respect and reverence and worship in every thought and every mention of the name of Jesus because all authority has been given to him in heaven and earth.

Now, as you read through the Gospel of Matthew, you can see how the Gospel writers were very concerned to bring out his authority, to emphasize it, to display it, and they do so in a variety of different ways; they highlight different aspects of his life and ministry. And we won't bother going through all of these passages, turning to them, although I would really like to do that except that I know it would make us be here for like three

hours and that wouldn't be good, but as you read through the Gospel of Matthew, you see that Jesus had authority in his teaching. At the end of Matthew, chapter 7, they were astonished at the authority with which he taught. People said, "Never has a man spoken like this man speaks." He had authority in his teaching. In his ministry, he demonstrated authority over human disease. He demonstrated authority over demons as he commanded them to come out, sent them into swine. They obeyed the command of his voice even though they themselves were supernatural beings. He had authority over nature. He could look at a raging sea and say, "Hush, be still," and instantly the surface turned to smooth glass. He had authority to forgive sins. He told the paralytic, "My son, your sins are forgiven." And to prove that he had that spiritual authority, he manifested a physical authority and said, "Now get up, pick up your pallet, rise and go home." A man who had never walked suddenly stood up in the midst of many witnesses and walked out having never have walked in the 40 years or so of his earthly life. Jesus had the authority to raise the dead, "Lazarus, come forth." A dead man, a dead man responds to the authority of Christ. He had authority over human blindness. He had authority over mute tongues. He had authority over the temple of God. He has authority over the judgment of men. He had authority over his own life. He said, "I have the authority to lay it down. I have the authority to take it up again." He has authority over eternal life and we're just doing a little sweep of this and it would be far more edifying for all of us if we took the time to go through those passages so that we felt the weight of the details, but that's a dozen things that I listed there without even trying very hard. Authority. Authority. Authority. Inanimate objects respond to his authority. Dead men respond to his authority. Jesus here at the conclusion of this Gospel, when he says in verse 18, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth," listen, in light of everything that preceded those prior 28 chapters, in light of what preceded that, when Jesus says, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth," he is making an incontestable statement. No one could legitimately challenge that statement in light of everything that had preceded it. He had proven it in his ministry. Nothing could hinder his purpose.

Now listen, there is one other aspect to this that makes this so amazing as you try to put yourself in the sandals of the disciples as they heard Jesus say that, what had just happened? What had just happened before Jesus made this statement? He himself had been resurrected from the dead. The person who was saying that, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth," was standing there as a resurrected man, the resurrected Son of God. They knew he had been dead. There were witnesses to him being buried. The Roman soldiers had punctured his side to make sure and verify that he was dead and they were in the business of death. They knew death when they saw it. They wouldn't have taken him from the cross if they hadn't known that he was dead. And now here he is after that event, standing there alive. This resurrected Christ is standing there saying, "All authority has been given to Me." The resurrection was the crowning proof, it was the capstone of the demonstration of his authority, his great authority. Even death itself could not hold him within its prison. The final realm of authority, death itself, Jesus had gone in and come out on the other side, conquered it. This is amazing authority. His authority had been established beyond question in every possible way.

Well listen, we have to understand as a fellowship as we grow toward becoming a church, we have to realize individually and collectively, this is of such fundamental primary importance, as we grow as a fellowship, we must realize, we must feel the responsibility of, the privilege of, this very fundamental fact: we answer to the authority of Christ as he has made it known in the Scriptures. This is not our church. The church does not belong to men, a true Gospel church does not belong to men, it belongs to the Lord of the church. Christ died for the church. He secured the church with his own blood. It belongs to him and so we have a high responsibility to be under his authority, to honor his authority by honoring his word and by obeying it. I realize that we all sin and fall short of the glory of God, but both individually and collectively as a fellowship, that does not mean that we tolerate it. That does not mean that we accept it and accommodate it in our lives. No, sin is our sworn enemy. Error is our sworn enemy because we stand under the authority of Christ and we are answerable to him. People who embrace that principle, people who want to honor the authority of Christ, are going to find a home at Truth Community Fellowship, and people who don't embrace that, aren't going to be real comfortable here. I'm happy for people to come no matter what but we put Christ at the center, his authority at the center. That is what we answer to. We're all under the authority of Christ.

Is that clear? Does that make sense to everybody? And I just ask you, you don't have to nod, you can if you want to but I just ask you to consider in your heart: is that the direction that your spiritual life is going? Do you want to move in that direction of honoring the authority of the one to whom all authority belongs? Well, that's where we're going as a fellowship. That's what we want to stand for and to not just give lip service to it. I've had enough conversations with you to know that we've all been in situations where people have paid lip service to Christ but not really honored it and you can tell the difference, and Jesus himself addressed that in his ministry. He said, "Why do you call me Lord, Lord and do not do what I say? If you call me Lord, then follow me. If you call me Lord, then obey me." Well, that's the commitment of our heart and we realize that there are going to be hits and misses along the way but we want to establish in our minds, establish at the heart of this fellowship, that the authority of Christ is preeminent. We've already talked in days gone by about Psalm 19 and the authority of Scripture, those things are one and the same: it's the word of God; it's the word of Christ, the word of God written, the word of God Incarnate. And the authority of Christ is the justification for what we're doing, right? It's the authority of Christ. He has commanded that his people go and make disciples. Well, that's why we're doing what we're doing.

Look at verse 18 with me again. "Jesus came up and spoke to them, saying, 'All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth.'" The government of the universe and the oversight of the church universal belongs to the risen Lord, and so with utter simplicity Christ declares the basis of the Great Commission; he roots it in his own authority. It's his own inexhaustible authority by which the church goes out and does what it does. When I say the church, I'm speaking broadly and we're included in that. But listen, I realize that it's not fashionable to talk in these terms of these days in our postmodern times, the very concept of authority is not one...it's at a discount, you could say. But just to help you process and to evaluate this and to apply this in your own heart, "Am I understanding

this?" Do you get what Christ is saying here? Well, listen, you're understanding this if there is a sense of awe, a sense of even fear that rises up in your heart. Wow, we are conscious of being in the presence of one who can raise the dead. We're conscience of being in the presence of the one who created the heavens and the earth and Hebrews 1 says, "upholds them by the word of His power." When the Apostle John in the book of Revelation saw Christ in Revelation 1, he fell at his feet like a dead man. Well, that's what a sense of encounter, a sense of understanding of the authority of Christ does to you. There is a sense in which you say, you feel exposed, you feel vulnerable, you feel like you need to bend your knee to that authority. That, if that is anywhere in your heart, you have a sense that, "Ah, that's what it should provoke." This in the presence of absolute eternal authority, we come and all of a sudden silliness and flippancy and sin don't seem too attractive; you realize that there is a sense of responsibility and you just want to bow low before him. That's a proper response to what Christ has said here. Authority brings forth respect. Absolute authority brings forth worship and submission to him. So the authority of Christ is at the core of what we do here.

Now secondly, we want to look at the command of Christ and there is so much packed into this. One of the things as I have taught Scripture over the years that just continually reinforces and is one of the evidences of the inspired nature of the word of God, is how much truth the Holy Spirit and Christ are able to compacted in such few words. You know, to properly expound on what God has written in his word, you spend 30, 40, 50 minutes talking about two or three verses. What Jesus said in 10 or 15 seconds takes us days and weeks to try to plumb the depths of. Well, that's the product of an infinite mind. That's evidence of an infinite mind at work, of infinite intelligence, of omniscience speaking forth out of the fullness of the overflow of the infinite mind of God. Well, that's what we have coming up here in verses 19 and 20 as we look at the command of Christ.

Look at verse 19 with me there. I use the New American Standard Version if sometimes people ask about that. In verse 19, Jesus said, "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 to observe all that I commanded you." We'll stop there and finish the rest of it in a few moments. Well, you've heard Bible teachers over the years say the simple thought, when you see the word "therefore" in verse 19, "Go therefore," you need to know what the "therefore" is there for, right? Well the "therefore" means that what follows is rooted in what went beforehand. Jesus said in verse 18, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth, therefore," the things that follow. The connection between what precedes and what follows is what you're trying to figure out when you see the word "therefore."

Well here, understand this, it's so clear and so obvious right on the face of the text: Jesus is about to command his disciples to go and make other disciples. He says, "therefore go and make disciples." Understand this: the command to "make disciples" flows from the authority of Christ. It's rooted in the authority of Christ. His unlimited authority gives rise to a universal mission and so he says, "Because I have all authority, now I am commanding you to go do this. This is what you," speaking to the 11 disciples there and whoever else was with them, "this is what I based on my authority command you to do."

Jesus takes his authority and then he commands his disciples to do something and so you cannot be a passive Christian, you cannot be a Christian and unconverted, you cannot be a Christian that is not changed, you cannot be a Christian who is not affected by the command that follows here because we respond to the authority of Christ, and because he has authority, he has the authority command us. He has the authority to command his disciples. He has that authority, he has it by right of redemption, he bought them with his blood; he has the authority by right of creation, he is the one who made us. I mean, his authority is just pervasive and so we respect that and we honor it.

Well, what does he say based on his authority? Look at verse 19 with me again, he says, "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations." On a grammatical level, here as we read it in English we see, "Go, make disciples, baptizing them, teaching them." On a grammatical level, the real command, the central command here is "make disciples." 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.

Here's one of the things that I want you to see. There is so much here. I should have spent two or three weeks on this passage but I'm not going to do that. Here's what I want you to see: the blessings that you and I have received in salvation are meant to be distributed. They are meant to be shared. We are meant to, those of us that Christ has bought as his own disciples, those of us who have become disciples, are to be instruments in making other disciples. That is why we exist on a human level. The church is not a social institution for people to come together and enjoy simply earthly fellowship with no real intention to it. You know, you can join the Rotary Club and hang out with people, the question for us is why do we come together as a spiritual body of believers in Jesus Christ? We come because we need to become better disciples ourselves and we come because we need to be the instruments of other disciples being made. There is a purpose to what we do. It is not simply for us to just have a place to come together that we can call our own spiritual home. We have to be conscious and mindful of the fact that we are under the authority of Christ and he has said, "Go and make disciples."

And beloved, I want to help you understand, there are no secrets here. There are no secrets here at all. I want to help you understand that at a very fundamental level, anything that we do in the future going forward and I trust that it's going to be a lot, there are a lot of exciting things that are ahead of us in this fellowship without a doubt. There are already exciting things happening but it's going to get even better, but everything that we do, everything is going to be funneled through a very narrow prism: is this consistent with the authority of Christ and is this consistent with, does this advance the goal of making disciples? Does this buildup the people of God and does it promote others coming to know Christ? Anything that does not fit within that paradigm is not something that is for us to do. We have to know what we're doing, we have to be focused about it, and part of it starts with understanding that as you have become a disciple of Christ, as God has blessed you with his salvation, is to realize that it's not meant to stop there, it's meant to flow through you so that that is reproduced in the lives of other people. That's the whole point and so there is a sense in which we understand that when we come together as God continues to build this group, it's for our benefit, yes, but it's not

supposed to stop with us. Even now, even in these early days as we're just getting started, we already need to be looking out beyond our walls and realizing that somehow there are people that we are yet to meet that we are supposed to make disciples of. There is a purpose to this that extends beyond the building, extends beyond us. Jesus said, "Make disciples of all the nations." Well, we don't do every nation as one particular fellowship but we look to do what our part is going to be.

Now, let's look at that concept of making disciples a little more closely. To make disciples, what does it mean? What do you mean "make disciples"? Well, to make disciples means to bring someone into a submissive relationship to Jesus Christ in which that person learns from Christ, learns from his word, accepts the authority of Christ and obeys his commands. The measure of success of making a disciple is measured by a transformed life. Now, in some areas, that's a totally foreign concept because in some areas, the idea is, "How many people came forward last night? We had 30 conversions for Christ last night." Well, whatever you think about that, that doesn't mean that you've turned them into disciples. You can read about the history of evangelistic crusades in the middle of the last century and realize that so many of those people that were shown flooding down in stadiums never ended up in a church. They never ended up with lives that were transformed. And when you measure it by the standard of making disciples, of people coming to bring their lives into conformity with and in submission to the authority of the Lord Jesus Christ, you realize that those numbers were a hollow victory because that is not what Christ called us to do was to make a public display and then people go back to the way they were living before? That's nonsense. That's utter nonsense. I don't care how many people did it, it's utter nonsense when you evaluate it in light of what Christ said. We are to make disciples who follow him. So we're not going to count numbers like that at Truth Community Fellowship. We're not going to try to make a big display. We're more concerned about the long-term impact of the teaching of the word of God. We're more concerned about seeing people who respond rightly to trials in their lives. We are more concerned about seeing people who repent from sin. We're more concerned to see people with lives that are conformed to the image of Christ than we are about putting on a show of getting people to line up and other people saying, "Oh! Wow! 35 people. 552 people." Please. Please. Make disciples.

If you want another text to hang your thought on on these thoughts, in John 6, at the end of John 6, large crowds were following Jesus, and we should turn there. John 6. This wasn't in my notes but John 6. I just want you to see this because this is such a fundamental point. This is such a fundamental point. John 6 in verse 60. I won't bother to set the whole context because I'm already off on a tangent and if you go on a tangent off a tangent, well, then you never get back to where you were going, but you need to see this. You need to see this. John 6:60, "Therefore many of His disciples, when they heard this said, 'This is a difficult statement; who can listen to it?'" At some point, at some point in the teaching ministry of a church, people should find it difficult. This idea of easy-believism or seeker-sensitive things, "We want you to be comfortable here," at some point it has to get hard because there is a confrontation of authority. People who are in sin, people who do not know Christ are rulers and gods of their own life and that self-autonomy has to be confronted with the authority of Christ. They have to abandon their

self-authority in order to come under the authority of Christ. Well, until you start to confront them with that, it's never difficult. Well, when it's never difficult, you're teaching them that there's a wide road to heaven that everybody can go on and Jesus said, "No, it's a narrow way and there are few people who find it."

So, John 6:61, "Jesus, conscious that His disciples grumbled at this, said to them, 'Does this cause you to stumble? What then if you see the Son of Man ascending to where He was before? It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh profits nothing; the words that I have spoken to you are spirit and are life. But there are some of you who do not believe.' For Jesus knew from the beginning who they were who did not believe, and who it was that would betray Him. And He was saying, 'For this reason I have said to you, that no one can come to Me unless it has been granted him from the Father.'" Now, all of that to build up to this one statement and remember we're talking about the big evangelistic crusades and counting numbers and all of this as if numbers were the proof of effective ministry. It's not. It's not. If numbers were the proof of effective ministry, the next verse would declare the Lord Jesus Christ to be a failure. Look at verse 66, "As a result of this many of His disciples withdrew and were not walking with Him anymore." When they were confronted with the authority of Christ, they left. When he got down to brass tacks with them, they fled. Well, there's going to be an element of that in true ministry and the idea is not to make the umbrella tent as broad as it possibly can be so that anybody can say Jesus without lipping is welcomed as though they were a believer in Christ. That's not the case. That's not the case. Going back to Matthew 28, the idea of making disciples is that people are brought into a submissive relationship to him that results in life change, and absent the life change, we can't say that we've made a disciple, right? This isn't complicated. This is right on the pages of Scripture. It's right there on the surface.

So we make Christ known. We proclaim him. We teach the Scriptures so that others will follow him. Jesus said, "Follow Me," to Matthew in Luke 5, and Matthew left everything and followed him. That's what we're looking for. And listen, listen, if you're questioning whether you're a Christian or not and you're trying to sort through all of these issues, look, you've got to come face-to-face with the authority of Christ and realize that becoming a Christian means you're bowing to his authority and trusting in his work on the cross to be the source of the forgiveness of your sins.

Now, look at verse 19 again, he says, "Go and make disciples of all the nations." It's the term that is regularly used for Gentiles. The disciples, in the course of Matthew's Gospel, had focused on the Jews in their ministry during Jesus' time on earth but now Jesus is expanding their mission to all of the nations. Now the mission extends to every corner of the globe and that's what I was referring to earlier; what Jesus says here brings all people in the world under the scope of its authority. Jesus says, "Go make disciples of all the nations." There is no limit to the mission of the church. It's staggering. Can you imagine being one of the 11? Judas was gone, of course. This ragtag bunch, all of them whom had fled from Jesus at his trial and now just a few short weeks later, Jesus looks at them and tells them to go make disciples of all the nations? That's insanity. That's crazy. How could you commit a mission like that to people who had no influence and weren't even faithful enough to you to stay around when your trial got going? How can you do that?



Jesus could do it because all authority had been given to him and his authority and his power was going to be the source of their success. It was not success in their own strength.

"Go and make disciples," verse 19, "all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit." The grammar shows that baptism is a part of discipleship. Baptism is part of making disciples; that there is this public proclamation of saving faith. In one manner or another and when the time comes, as the Lord gives fruit to our ministry, we'll have baptisms and people will testify to how the Lord saved them and changed them. The reason a church does that is because Christ commanded it. You go back to that.

He says, "baptize them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit." Have you ever noticed this, this is very interesting grammar, he says, "in the name," singular, in the one name and then he says, "the Father, Son and Holy Spirit." Did he have a problem counting? Why doesn't it say the names of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit? Why a singular name and then he names three persons? That doesn't make mathematical sense. It's an expression, it's an indication, it's a point or two the nature of the Trinity. There is one God, therefore only one name, and yet this God who has one undivided essence exists in three distinct personalities: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. They are one God existing eternally as three persons and that's what Jesus is expressing here. It's very precise. It's very clear. The name, one name of the Father, notice the articles here, of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, those three articles noting the distinction between the Father and the distinction between the Son and the distinction with the Holy Spirit highlighting their separate persons. So talking about the depth of the magnitude of this passage, in 15, 20 seconds, Jesus displayed his authority, brought all the nations under his authority, commanded the disciples and pointed to and hinted at the Trinitarian nature of God. That's amazing. That's a reflection of his divine mind.

Now, going on, realizing that we are leaving some things untapped in the passage here, this is really key in verse 20, "teaching them to observe all that I commanded you." Look, our services here are pretty simple, aren't they? A couple three hymns, we read a Scripture passage, and we teach for an hour, sometimes longer, sometimes less. You teach. You teach. You teach. Why do we do that? Because I understand that there are a lot of church growth consultants that would say, "This is not the way to do it at all." I understand that homiletics professors throughout the country would say, "This is not the way to do it at all. You've got to lighten it up. You've got to tell more stories. You need to talk about your personal life and your kids and give people something that they can connect to." Well, look, some of you have been around that and after a while, that just kind of wears you out and you end up with not too much, don't you? That's a dead end road. That stuff is meaningless when life starts to collapse on you, when you are betrayed by people you trusted, when horrible trials intervene in your life, when you yourself are laying on your deathbed and facing the issues of eternity. I was with a guy dying of cancer two days ago, a close friend of mine, talking through these issues. At that point, the emptiness of a whole entire philosophy of ministry is exposed and that's why we're not going that direction.

If you go out and all you've done is laugh and then you get the phone call from the doctor, the laughs are pretty empty, and all of a sudden you look back with a little sense of indignation of the betrayal of an office, a betrayal of a pulpit that didn't prepare you for life and didn't prepare you for eternity. We are not going that route here. We are not going to go that route. Look, you can go anywhere and find that, right? And the reason, here's what I want you to see, the reason that we can't go that way is because that is not what Jesus commanded us to do. Remember, this all fits together: we are under the authority of Christ. This is his church. He bought us with his blood. Our responsibility is not to do it our way so that people will like us or so that people will laugh at us and think we are cool. Our responsibility is to honor the authority of Christ and what he said to do was to go and teach them, "to observe all that I commanded you." That's why we do this. It is a simple linear connection from point A to point B. Here we are, we are disciples of Christ. We look up at our authority, we look up at our Lord and we say, "Lord, what are we to do here?" He says, "Teach them," and so what do we do? We teach them. It's not complicated. I don't need a bunch of church fad books and you don't either. This is why we teach, it's because it's what Christ commanded us to do. We teach people the Bible. We teach people the doctrines of God. We teach them the attributes of God. We teach them what it means that Christ died on the cross to save men from their sins. What does it mean to be justified. What does it mean to be sanctified. What does it mean to be glorified. We teach these things because it's the doctrines of the Bible and the Bible is the word of God and the word of God is the means by which he dispenses his instruction and his authority. That's why we do it.

And here's what I want you to see, beloved: even as we talk about teaching, teaching as Jesus means it, teaching in the context of making disciples is more than simply transmitting knowledge from one brain to another. It's not about a transmittal of knowledge, it's about a transformation of life that is brought from disobedience into obedience. That kind of transformation is harder to quantify but it yields a more profound result. You know it when you see it, don't you? You recognize when someone is truly converted. You recognize when someone's mind has been submitted to the authority of Christ. You intuitively recognize it. There is a reason for that, it's because that's what churches are supposed to produce are people just like that.

Let me say one other thing, not knowing what you've heard in the past because we're all new here together, at least new to me. You will often hear people talking about evangelism and saying, "Before you can share the Gospel with someone, you need to build a relationship with them." You've heard that, right? You know, relationship evangelism, that kind of stuff, and until you have that relationship, you really don't have the platform, you don't have the authority with which to speak the Gospel to them. Now look, I'm all for building relationships with unbelievers but I want you to understand something really important, very very important: your authority to share the Gospel with an unbeliever is not rooted in your relationship with them at all. That is secondary. It is elementary. Your authority to share the Gospel at any time in any place comes from the fact that Jesus said to do it and if you have the opportunity to walk up to a gas station clerk and say, "I want to tell you about the Gospel of Jesus Christ even though I have

never seen you before in my life," you have authority to do that because that is what Christ has commanded us to do. We are not subject to that kind of relational constraint in sharing the Gospel. We can share the Gospel in the context of relationships but we are not isolated to that as though we couldn't tell a stranger on the street how they could find the forgiveness of their sins. Look, if you couldn't share the Gospel with someone that you didn't have a relationship, the whole point of writing books and tracts would be irrelevant because the person who is writing them is preparing them for an audience he doesn't know, and you just have to sift through all of the clutter of conventional wisdom in so-called evangelical churches and come back to this passage and realize where our authority and where what we do comes from. We teach and we teach because Christ commanded us. We don't have to wait for somebody to say, "Would you please tell me what I must do to have eternal life." You don't have to wait for that.

And there's something really important as I say that at stake that I just want to make really clear to you: what the person in front of you thinks is less important, it's always less important than the authority of Christ. That's the whole point. It's about having a Christ-centered approach to evangelism, a Christ-centered approach to dealing with people and understanding that this is what Christ has told us to do. What are we going to do, go to Christ and say, "Lord, I couldn't say anything to them because we didn't have a relationship"? Well, you know, Christ says, "What about my authority? What about what I said?" And all of a sudden that's put into the right context.

"Teaching them to observe," verse 20, all that I commanded you." You know, this includes not only the teachings of Christ but it includes the entire Bible. Jesus throughout his ministry affirmed the Old Testament, he affirmed creation, he affirmed Adam and Eve, he affirmed Noah, he affirmed Jonah, all his historical accounts and so his affirmation of the Old Testament was present throughout and so all the Old Testament is brought under the scope of what he commanded, and all of the New Testament is included because he is the one who authorized the writing of the New Testament as well. He appointed the apostles to write the Scriptures, they wrote under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit and thus the rest of the New Testament expresses the command of the Lord as well.

So we've covered a lot of ground here: the authority of Christ, the commands of Christ. That's the grounds of the Great Commission. Now let me say this, we've talked about how the authority of Christ provokes a sense of fear in us, I want you to see this and this is important too. I don't know that that's good, that I feel the need to say that this is important. The other stuff, that wasn't important but this is important. Look, in terms of how you think about these things devotionally, in terms of how you think about yourself in the presence of Christ, there is an element of fear in response to the authority of Christ but what I want you to see here and I'm sure you haven't thought about this in the context of this verse anyway, is that what Jesus has said here in the context of making disciples and you are here as a disciple of Christ, should promote within your heart a great sense of love for him and here's why I say that: Jesus said, "If you love Me," what? "Keep My commandments," right? So our obedience is a reflection of our love but understand this, think about it a little more broadly: if you're a Christian here today, it's because someone

shared the Gospel with you: in a book, in an article, personally, somebody speaking from a pulpit. Someone was obeying this commandment in one way or another and God used that in order to convert your soul. This command is the source of how you came to a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ. This command is the manner in which you were delivered from the domain of Satan and a future in hell and brought into the dominion, the kingdom of God in the Lord Jesus Christ, have forgiveness of sin and a certain hope of eternal heaven. And so this is precious to us because we are the beneficiaries.

We have received blessing through the outworking of this command and not only that, beloved, not only that, we need to treasure these things so so much. The Old Testament is lined with the blood of the prophets. Christ himself shed his blood for the salvation of your soul. In the years that followed, all but one of the apostles met the death of a martyr and the other one was exiled. And in the years that followed that, there were waves of persecution through the first 300 years of the Roman Empire, ten waves of persecution. People died over this. People's blood was shed over this and throughout the centuries, it has been like that and even today, people are suffering at the edge of the sword for the sake of the same Gospel that brings us together here today. We enjoy the blessings of salvation in this place of relative peace and prosperity but we have received it through a river of blood that has come down over millennia to us. That is precious. That is something that should humble us and make us realize how much we should love the Gospel. We love the peace and joy that come from being Christians, we love the fellowship of fellow believers, we love our hope in heaven, well, all I'm saying to you is recognize the incalculable cost by which that has been delivered to you. And when you're conscious of that, you love it, you love Christ, and it bends your stubborn will so that you want to comply rather than to continue to resist. Whatever the authority of Christ has, has implications in your life.

This commission led to your salvation and so we love Christ for it, and we love him even more for the third point here. There is so much authority that has been packed into what he said here that it would almost be intimidating, you would almost shrink back from it, but look at the end of verse 20. Point 3 here as we remember these aspects of the Great Commission: the authority of Christ, the command of Christ. Here in verse 20, he brings out his love for his sheep, his love and his promise and his protection for his sheep with this third point: the promise of Christ. The promise of Christ is point 3 and look at verse 20 with me here. He says, "teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and," here we go, third point, "lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age." This is a promise of the personal presence of Christ from that moment forward until the consummation of the ages.

"I am with you to the end of the age." Jesus as we said earlier, is speaking to men who aren't influential. How could they ever do this? Where would the power to do this come from? Jesus says, "I am the source of the power. I am the guarantor of the success of what I'm commanding you to do." All of that authority is going to be exercised to their benefit. The one with all authority is the one who will always attend their efforts to obey his Great Commission. As we seek to build this fellowship into a flourishing church, that same promise applies to us. Christ is with us as we honor his word. Christ is with us as

we seek to make disciples. Christ is with us as we teach and instruct and as we individually conform our lives to what his word says. The presence of the risen Christ, invisible though it may be, is nonetheless real and active and animating the life of what goes on when his people respond to this Great Commission.

Charles Spurgeon said this, he said, "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 hands shall be sufficient for them in their high calling." As magnificent and almost intimidating as the authority of Christ is and as magnificent and high the goal of making disciples and the instruction from his word is, we have here the means by which we find our rest and our success: Christ is somehow working through all of this on his own to accomplish his purposes. As I teach, Christ takes his word and he uses it in your lives in a diverse manner of ways. The way he applies it to your life is different from the way he applies it to yours and that's a reflection of his power because he's the one who is building up his church. He uses his authority not only to command us, he uses his authority to guarantee the success of the mission. I run out of words to describe that kind of glorious truth. It is beyond our power to convert sinners, but it is not beyond the power and authority of Christ.

He says, "I am with you always, even to the end of the age." Let's bring this home and make it really personal. We've talked about this in the terms of the mission of the church, the church universal and applying it from time to time to us here, but this promise that Christ makes here is intensely personal to each one of us as well. "I am with you always, even to the end of the age." Listen to what J. C. Ryle says about this. This is a promise that provokes trust. He said and I quote, "Let all 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, with us in death. With us in time and with us in eternity." He goes on to say, "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."

If you're a Christian here today, those words belong to you. This is your Christ. This Shepherd belongs to you. This eternal Son of God bought you for his own. You are his and the glorious thing is, he is yours. You belong to him and he belongs to you. We fear him because of his authority, we love him for the sake of the Gospel, but we trust him because of his promise to be with us and in that we find our rest, in these things we find our reason for existence as a fellowship, in these things we go forward in confidence of the ultimate blessing of Christ on our lives and on this ministry.

Bow with me in prayer, would you?

*Our Father, what feeble human words cannot accomplish, may you accomplish by your Spirit. Lord, as we pray in response to these things, Father, would you start by making us better disciples of Christ ourselves? Father, for some here who do not know Christ, I*

*pray that you would lead them by your Spirit to repentance and faith in Christ. If you are here and you don't know Christ, you are without excuse and I ask you and I invite you to come to Christ. He came to seek and to save the lost. He promises you eternal life if you will turn from sin and put your faith in him. I invite you to Christ. And Father, I pray that you would open hearts to that end. For those of us that know you, make us better disciples and then as we seek to honor your word through the establishment of this fellowship, Lord Jesus, would you be with us as we teach, as we love one another, as we serve in your name? Father, would you energize the efforts that we present to you for the sake of the glory of the name of Christ and the further building up of his church around the world? Help us to that end. Give us grace to that end, that we might honor you and that we might see the fruit of the labor that you have called us to. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.*

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