

**Sermon File # 785**

**Scripture Text: Matthew 28:16-20**

**Sermon Title: *The Great Commission***

**Manuscript written by Roger Roberts and sermon preached**

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**Unless otherwise noted, Scripture quotations are from the New International Version, 2011.**

**Sources cited in this manuscript are listed at the end.**

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## ***The Great Commission***

### **Introduction:**

Open your Bibles with me to Matthew 28:16-20. Last Sunday and today we're looking at the two passages of Scripture that form our church's vision and mission statement. Last Sunday we looked at the Great Commandment of Jesus, that we love God with all our being and our neighbor as ourselves. Today we consider Jesus' Great Commission of the church.

Here in Matthew's gospel, the setting is on a mountain or hilltop, which is a frequent setting in Matthew for close encounters with Christ and dramatic revelations of his glory. Included among the worshipers on the mountaintop are the eleven disciples (minus Judas). Most commentators say the eleven were probably joined by other followers of Jesus, perhaps the "more than 500" mentioned in 1 Corinthians 15:6.

Follow as I read **Matthew 28:16-20**.

One New Testament scholar has written that "The five short verses that comprise this Great Commission passage are among the most important to establish the ongoing agenda of the church throughout the ages" (Wilkins, 947). So, as the Great

Commandment defines our nature and character as a church, the Great Commission defines Jesus' agenda for our mission.

I think it is important that God's people share a common vision, and to me a vision is to be none other than that which Jesus himself has for his church, which is to be found in Scripture. I desire for East Madison Baptist Church the greatness Jesus desires and has designed for his church. There are a lot of models today for the church, and concepts based on what has proven to be successful in other places. Regardless of these, I think you would do well to base your vision of and aspirations for the church on what Jesus says the church should be and do and that we follow his agenda for the church.

Jesus gave two directives for the church that comprise his vision that should become our vision for being a faithful people. He gave, first of all, as we considered last Sunday, the Great Commandment. This is the summary commandment to love the Lord our God with all our heart, mind, and strength, and to love our neighbor as ourselves (Mark 12:30-31; Matthew 22:34-40). The Great Commandment addresses the motivation for the church.

The other directive is the Great Commission, which is Jesus' vision and agenda for your and every church. The church will then become great as Jesus measures greatness because you will be faithful to his agenda. One of the key words in this text is the modifier "all." "Strikingly," as one scholar notes, four times this word is used and it serves as the structure for our thoughts this morning (Turner, 687).

Let's note first this morning that the Great Commission...

### **Is given with *all authority***

"Then Jesus came to them and said, 'All authority (*exousia*, power/authority) in heaven and earth has been given to me'" (verse 18).

Jesus had finished the work on earth he had come to do. He provided for the salvation of sinners through his suffering and death on the cross. He was now risen and preparing to ascend to heaven as exalted King of kings and Lord of lords. Jesus' announcement that all authority in heaven and on earth had been given him was "an astounding claim" (Robertson, 244). Jesus was also setting the stage for that Day when he will return, when before him every knee will bow and every tongue will confess that he is Lord to the glory of God the Father (Philippians 2:10-11).

But his work of Kingdom expansion on earth wasn't over. With his authority as exalted, risen Lord and Savior, he announces his lordship over his followers. He gives his marching orders, and his authority is, first...

### *Over worshipers*

Of this crowd of perhaps 500 or more (1Corinthians 15:6), many, perhaps most, worshiped him. They recognized his worth and worshiped in adoring humility. The

word for worship here is the word that means to prostrate oneself before the object of worship (*prosekunesan*, Arndt & Gingrich, 724).

The Great Commission is given to worshipers, those who recognize that Jesus Christ is worthy of adoration and obedience. It was in his experience of worshiping holy God in his temple that Isaiah received his commission to go with the Lord's message to the people (Isaiah 6:1-13).

We are never called into or prepared for service to the Lord until we have met him and learned to worship him. Worship is what centers our hearts on Christ and makes him central in our lives. There we are reminded of our sin and emptiness and of Christ's holiness and absolute power to bless and strengthen us in his service. Worship is that act by which we recognize and submit to Christ's authority over us.

In worship we are reminded of our total indebtedness to grace. Our hearts are once again stirred with grateful love. Worship calls us back to obey the Great Commandment and prepares us to receive the Great Commission.

But our text tells us that Jesus came to announce his authority not only over worshipers but also...

#### *Over doubters*

The crowd that met Jesus in that time of worship and receiving the Great Commission included doubters. We don't know why they doubted. Even the great sign of Jesus' bodily resurrection didn't eliminate doubt, which shows that faith is a work of grace and is not of sight and human reasoning. Perhaps, as some have suggested, many were understandably confused about how to respond to and behave in the presence of a supernaturally manifested, exalted, and holy being. Some of the disciples worshiped almost instinctively. Others were less sure how to react (Blomberg, 430).

This word in verse 17 for doubt (*distazo*) refers more to hesitation than to settled unbelief. It was perhaps a temporary suspension when they had a mind to believe and one to disbelieve. They were "in two minds" (Guinness, 23f).

Jesus comes this morning to give his Great Commission to those who are doubters. You haven't yet settled on Jesus but you are open and ready to listen and willing to receive the truth

You here this morning may have not settled on faith in Jesus, but the fact that you are here is evidence he is working in your heart to make himself known to you. The Father is seeking worshipers to glorify him around the throne of heaven for eternity (John 4:23). In fact, relating to the doubters here this morning is an important objective of the Great Commission. Our first objective is to reach out to you, that you might become worshipers of Jesus along with us. Pastor John Piper says that mission exists because worship doesn't (*LNBG*) No doubt some of these doubters became worshipers as God gave them grace to move beyond their doubts.

You and I are given his authority and power of Christ as we join in his great work. He has power to turn your unbelieving spouse or neighbor or classmate (or even yourself!) into a worshiper.

The next “all” in the Great Commission is that it...

### **Is to include *all nations***

We are to go into all nations (19). Because in the Greek the word for “go” is a participle, some interpreters and preachers make it sound as if the Great Commission is a casual, matter of fact ordeal. They like to paraphrase these words, “As you are going,” or, “Since you’re going anyway.” But the best scholarship says there is a strong force in this participle, “going” (McKnight, 1641). Our going, in other words, is to be intentional, as an act of obedience. Even as we go forth in our mundane routines of life there is to be a sense of purpose, knowing God is in control even of our normal “traffic patterns” and our casual conversations and serendipitous encounters.

Real worship won’t let us remain still but will send us forth from the mountaintop to the valley of human need as missional Christians, not just as supporters of missionaries

From Jesus’ Great Commission we see that we are to go to all nations, first...

#### *At home*

The word for nations is “ethne,” and means “peoples, cultures, or nations.” Every one of us has an “ethne” where God has placed us. It is an identifiable group of people who have something in common with you. Obviously, you share the same language, but also you share common interests. Included in your “nation” are members of your family. These are the priority in your mission field, your own nuclear family.

At the lunch table with the young men I met with regularly in a former pastorate, it was gratifying to hear one say he was going to have to back off some of his church activity in order to plan to be with his family for some evening meals at home (In fact, this young man had become overly involved in church responsibilities that could have been delegated to others). This is a vital part of his doing the Great Commission to his most important “nation/ethne.”

God has given you other “ethne’ in what has been called your “concentric circles of concern” (Thompson). God has placed you in your school, your work place, neighborhood and places of recreation. Here are people with whom you have regular contact.

Effective evangelism and certainly disciple-making are going to have to be done through one-on-one relationships. And in what has been for a long time an increasingly secular culture, relationships are perhaps the only way of reaching the unconverted and unchurched.

Palmer Ofuoku, although not a Christian, was placed in a mission school in Nigeria because his parents knew he would receive a good education there. He attended the school for years, yet remained an adherent of a traditional African religion. One year a new missionary came to the school who began to develop close relationships with the students, including Palmer, and eventually led this young Nigerian to Christ. Palmer Ofuoku explained the missionary's influence, saying "He built a bridge of friendship to me, and Jesus walked across." That's our ministry as ambassadors for Christ, as ministers of reconciliation (Harbour).

As missional Christians, we need to build some friendship bridges close to home.

We are to go also to all nations...

### *Around the world*

One of the reasons it's impossible to be an obedient Christian outside of fellowship and involvement with a local church is that the church is given the assignment to carry out its mission in the Great Commission. Another Great Commission passage, Acts 1:8, delineates the outreach of the church's mission. Before his Ascension, Jesus told his disciples they would receive the power of the Holy Spirit and be his witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.

At EMBC you have an assignment to go to your "Jerusalem" right here in Madison. Consider events, such as this summer's Block Party and VBS, to draw the un-churched onto your property to express "neighborliness" and acceptance to those outside our fellowship, creating opportunities for unbelievers to mingle with believers, with a prayer that God will use these gestures of hospitality to give them an awareness that might lead to future contacts with and ministry to them.

Certainly the "Judea" of EMBC is a great, un-reached mission field. You're already involved in directly supporting missionaries who have ministries here in Wisconsin, the US and the world, assisting a couple in New York City and supporting missionaries in Kyrgyzstan.

You are part of the work of the Great Commission to the nations to the ends of the earth. Through your mission giving, you help support missionaries locally and throughout the world. As you give, pray, and send volunteer teams, you are going to the ends of the earth. The Great Commission is to include all nations. As you seek to reach your own local *ethne*, you must not neglect reaching out to the ends of the earth.

The next "all" is that the Great Commission...

### **Is to involve teaching *all things***

The main verb in the commission is "*make disciples*, teaching... to obey everything (lit, *all things*) I have commanded you" (20). The Gospel of Matthew became a handbook on discipleship in the early church for the succeeding generation of

disciples of Jesus (Turner, 958). We are to teach others to obey the Lord Jesus by first of all...

### *Incorporating into the Body*

A disciple is a learner enlisted to be like his teacher. Jesus said, "A student is not above his teacher, but everyone who is fully trained will be like his teacher" (Luke 6:40). The Great Commission is based on the assumption we are becoming more like Jesus and thus commands that we reproduce ourselves in the lives of others.

Horrible negative examples of disciples are those being made by terrorist organizations, literally throughout the world. They are following and becoming like their teachers, bent on creating terror in order to disrupt social and government stability and carry out their agendas of hatred.

The *Great Commission* mandates us to go and make disciples who will become like us in the way we are like the Master Teacher, Jesus. And, the first step is to incorporate them into the Body of Christ, the local church. We are to call the lost to a relationship of obedience to Jesus as Lord, and that obedience begins with baptism (Wilkins, 954).

Then there is, in authentic disciple-making...

### *Instructing in the Word*

The *Great Commission* says we are to make obedient disciples. This is what Jesus meant by the work of the Father as being the work of making worshipers, those who honor and glorify God with their lives, and who will continue to worship throughout eternity (John 4:23). Our evangelism must be holistic. We are commanded to evangelize and disciple people toward spiritual maturity. We are commanded not just to spew out information but to oversee the transformation of the character of those we reach with the gospel (Turner, 690).

This means we stay with the new convert. We seek to help the new convert grow until he/she becomes a disciple-maker. Then we can grow by multiplication. I can't think of one member of East Madison Baptist who could not be a mentor to a new convert, simply meeting weekly with a new convert and going through the Gospel of Matthew, which is a great "manual for discipleship."

The Great Commission is to involve the teaching of all things, and finally, the work of the Great Commission...

### **Is done with him who is with us *always***

Jesus promises, "And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age" (20). Christ "accomplished His work in His incarnation. He gives us His presence so that we may accomplish ours" (Nixon, 850). The Great Commission is done with him who graciously gives us...

### *His presence*

This last sentence of our text is a great fact and promise: the Lord Jesus is with us always, lit. "all the days" (Nolland, 1271). "To the very end of the age" could actually be simply the equivalent of "forever" (Blomberg, 433). In John 13-17 Jesus explains his presence with his followers through the Paraclete/Helper, who will be in us to enable us to continue his mission (Acts 1:1).

Jesus, on the mountain giving his Great Commission, is passing the torch to his disciples (Blomberg). He promises the Holy Spirit, who came upon them in full measure and permanently on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2). Now, he comes into every true believer at the decisive moment of commitment and rebirth by the Holy Spirit (Romans 8:9; Ephesians 4:30).

John RW Stott said that every church needs to ask what might happen if the Holy Spirit were not hypothetically but actually withdrawn from its fellowship, worship and ministries. What actual difference would the withdrawal of the Holy Spirit make on the way we relate, worship and act? Obviously, if his withdrawal were to make no difference, then we need to repent of just going through the motions and not joining God in his work, which requires the presence and power of the Holy Spirit. God's work is kingdom work and requires his supernatural wisdom, love and power.

The most important asset we have is the presence of God. Without him, Jesus said, we can do nothing (John 15:5). Prayer is not our offering God our "grocery list," nor is it overcoming God's reluctance to join in our pre-determined endeavors. Prayer is the language of dependence on God, and the expression of our heartfelt need for him. In prayer fellowship with God we discover his heart and the assignment he has for us. Prayer is the practice of the presence of God who invites us to join him in his work

We must be certain and aware of his presence, and claim as never before...

### *His promise*

A church with a sense of a desperate need for God is a church that is in a position of being blessed. Too long perhaps churches have depended on numbers, money, programs, leaders, reputation, and business sense

I realize that the success of the work God has for us to do within his kingdom will be given by his power and blessing alone. His presence alone will give joy to your worship and unity to your fellowship and power to your witness and disciple making.

### **Conclusion:**

Verse 17 of our text tells us that some worshiped Jesus and some doubted. We can surmise that these doubters didn't remain in a state of unbelief, but joined the other worshipers in their mission in the *Great Commission*.

Today you may be prepared to join the worshipers, *the People of the Great Commission*. Your presence here today is timely and strategic, just as with the doubters who heard Jesus on the mountain. You may sense Jesus is calling you into a life-changing relationship with him, and to be a learner and follower.

In the words of Dallas Willard, because of the ignorance and neglect by the church regarding this Great Commission, it is better termed perhaps “The Great Omission” of the Church. I challenge you to declare your dependence on the Holy Spirit and the purpose he has for you—to empower you to be his Christ-like people on mission with him to a lost world, the one that for you and me begins at our doorstep.

I have a new friend I made at the fitness center, where we often work out together. He’s a professional poker player and also owns a sports bar, where he grills amazing hamburgers, among other things. Although I gladly pay for myself and my guests, Mark will often treat me as his guest, and always announces my presence and brags about my physical fitness to his other patrons.

I got a step closer in our friendship, when, the morning his bar was robbed at gunpoint, I called him and offered to minister to anyone who might have been injured or traumatized. Mark was grateful for my call but more eager for me to give counsel to his daughter, whose mother recently died and who’s now caregiver for her grandmother with Alzheimer’s. She’s a sweet young lady who lives just a block or two from this church.

Mark said he and his wife want to come hear me preach, and I’ve given him a standing invitation to go to lunch after the service. They would have been here today, but he was asked to fly to Las Vegas for a poker tournament!

God has a sense of humor, to give an old Baptist preacher a friendship and mission to a poker-playing bar owner! Yet I think that’s as much of living by the Great Commission as it was to be the pastor of an international church in Brussels, Belgium.

All of us need to ask about the part God has for us. His calling is for us to join him in what he is doing in the Great Commission.

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