

¹⁶ Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them. ¹⁷ And when they saw him they worshiped him, but some doubted. ¹⁸ And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. ¹⁹ Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰ teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age."

Introduction

We must look again at Matthew 28.16-20 to find applications that go beyond the apostles to your place in the history of redemption, from the apostles to you. It includes you because the mission of the apostles extends to the end of the age (28.20). Their work goes beyond their own time in history and it extends to the very end of time. They labored and you enter into their labors. Therefore, the commission finds fulfillment through the apostolic gospel, the word of God that Jesus gave to us through them. Their witness to Christ is the very word of God that explains the gospel of the life, death, and resurrection of our Lord. You now have that word and you also have a commission from the risen Jesus.

The title, therefore, for this second look at the final paragraph in Matthew's Gospel is "Your commission from the Risen Jesus." By speaking of "your" commission, the point here is not to leave pastors out of the loop. There is no neglect of the duty of pastors because much of your duty to the great commission is to help the pastor do his duty to it. Because your duties and the pastor's duties interconnect in this way, this message does not leave the pastor off the hook.

Before stating the outline, we should note that our central text, of course, is Matthew 28.16-20, but we must fill out its application by viewing it in the context of Matthew 10 (the other half of the great commission) and in context of the NT as a whole (because 28.20 lunges forward).

In light of these things, we can focus the outline for today by asking and answering this question: "how does the commission from Christ apply to you?" Or, we may ask, "In the context of the task that rests on preachers (on your pastor), what duties do *you* have arising from the great commission of our risen Lord?" The answer is fourfold: learn how to obey, acknowledge Christ before men, live evangelistically, and pray evangelistically.

1A. Learn how to obey

The heart of our Lord's commission is disciple making. In this classic text, there is only one imperative, one command, and one duty: **make disciples** (28.19). That is the job of the apostles and pastors. It is the essence of the work that will go on to the end of history by the sovereignty of Jesus as Sabbath king. It is by the exercise of His authority that disciples *will* arise from the nations to constitute the new Israel, the church, the body of Christ with no distinction in it between Jew and Gentile. To the end of history, Jesus is building His church through apostles then and pastors now. Notably, therefore, if the pastor's job is to make disciples, then the job of church members, your job, is to be disciples. Of course, that means be learners and it means to learn with a particular goal, namely, the goal of learning how to obey the Lord Jesus through pastoral instruction because Jesus commands teaching for observing: **teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you** (28.20a). We can rightly call it the great teaching commission; we can add that it is the great teaching-*learning* commission. Your task exists on the learning side of the equation and it unfolds from the commission's many dimensions. Recall the three-dimensional cube with three sides in view: going, baptizing, and teaching are three perspectives on the same task, which is disciple making. Three questions help us review so we can move forward.

1) How do we call disciples *out from the nations*?

We do so by gospel witness to all men everywhere that explains three basic things (baptism, trinity, and commandments). Of course, we have to unpack all that goes with these things. Therefore, proclamation necessarily includes explanation; gospel proclamation is

worldview proclamation. In this context, gospel witness to people of all nations calls them to a commitment to live under the authority of Christ by His commandments, and it calls them to seal that discipleship commitment in baptism. Thus, we call them to repentance, to turn *from* going their own way *to* living under the authority of Jesus Messiah who secured the salvation of His people by His life, death, and resurrection.

2) How do we bring people *into the church*?

In a word, they enter the church by water baptism (28.19, **baptizing them into the name...**). In the Gospel of Matthew, John's baptism is the only explanation we have regarding the meaning of this washing rite (Mat. 3.11, **I baptize you with water for repentance, 3.6, and they were baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins**). By receiving baptism, John's hearers symbolically left the old covenant community and *entered* the new community. Thus, John opened the door to Christian baptism as the way of entry into the church Jesus builds. People of all nations (Jew and Gentile alike) enter the church confessing their sins in baptism.

When we practice this ritual of baptism by the Lord's command, we do not step outside of disciple-making; nor do we step outside of gospel proclamation or gospel teaching about the commandments. Baptizing is a distinct perspective in relation to going to the nations with the gospel of the trinity and the commandments. Baptism symbolizes, teaches, and proclaims the gospel by expressing the cleansing that God gives sinners when they turn from their sins and submit to His authority. Thus, practicing baptism and teaching on baptism continues to proclaim the gospel to you as baptized people, by reminding you of God's good news of cleansing and by reminding you of your commitment to observe all that Jesus commands.

3) How do we teach baptized people *in the church*?

This is just another aspect, the third aspect, of making disciples.

Gospel proclamation in all its aspects is teaching. Gospel preaching to the nations is gospel teaching (the 1st "ing"). Baptizing is gospel proclamation (the 2nd "ing"). Moreover, this third angle on disciple making (**teaching them**) is *not* where teaching begins, but it is where teaching continues: it is a distinct perspective on gospel teaching and preaching.

Thus, when we go to people everywhere with the gospel and teach them about baptism, the trinity, and the commandments, we call them to a commitment by baptism to live under the authority of the triune God. Accordingly, baptized sinners are people of commitment to God and His commands. Here is where the third dimension comes into view: additional to calling for commitment to Christ (to His authority in general and His commands in particular), and additional to sealing that commitment in repentance-baptism, disciple making includes teaching how to observe the commandments to the baptized; it includes teaching repentant people how to live under God's authority by Christ's commands.

In other words, *in the first place, your duty to the risen Lord is to learn how to fulfill your baptismal pledge by learning how to live under God's authority by Christ's commands.*

In terms from Matthew 10, your job is to walk worthy of your calling by receiving instruction in the apostolic gospel through your pastor. The commission calls apostles and in train with them, pastors to find worthy ones, to find those who will hear their words (10. 11-15, ¹¹ **And whatever town or village you enter, find out who is worthy in it and stay there until you depart.** ¹² **As you enter the house, greet it.** ¹³ **And if the house is worthy, let your peace come upon it, but if it is not worthy, let your peace return to you.** ¹⁴ **And if anyone will not receive you or listen to your words, shake off the dust from your feet when you leave that house or town**). "Worthy ones" are out there and God will lead preachers to them. You walk worthy of your calling when you receive your pastor and listen to his words. This helps him do his work of ministry.

Of course, what you learn has the *context of the Lord's teaching as a whole* and how that teaching extends to the entire Bible. Your first duty to the great commission of Christ is that of discipleship, of being a learner, of learning the whole counsel of God through the means He appointed. This demands work for both you and the pastor. It lays a foundation for wise principles regarding preaching (a philosophy of preaching) in which preaching has primacy in

worship and in which there is no wall of separation between preaching and teaching. Nor is there a wall of separation between receiving public ministry and house to house ministry from your pastor.

Consider how this works out when we think of the book of Romans properly as the gospel (Rom. 1.15, **I am eager to preach the gospel to you also who are in Rome**). When a pastor preaches through Romans paragraph by paragraph, he is proclaiming the gospel in all its details per that book.

Life long learning in a posture of worship characterizes the Christian walk. Consider the apostles worshipping the risen Jesus as the context of the great commission (28.17a). There is no intellectualism here; like the apostles, we have times of doubt (28.17b), but the commission begins with reverence for Christ and continues in a process of getting to know Him better and better. It includes an eye ball to eye ball relationship with your pastor in which you receive him, listen to his words, and heed his instruction to follow him as he follows the Lord.

2A. Acknowledge Christ before men

Matthew 10 gives insight into applications that belong to both preachers and all disciples (10.26-33):

²⁶ **"So have no fear of them, for nothing is covered that will not be revealed, or hidden that will not be known.** ²⁷ **What I tell you in the dark, say in the light, and what you hear whispered, proclaim on the housetops.** ²⁸ **And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell.** ²⁹ **Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? And not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father.** ³⁰ **But even the hairs of your head are all numbered.** ³¹ **Fear not, therefore; you are of more value than many sparrows.** ³² **So everyone who acknowledges me before men, I also will acknowledge before my Father who is in heaven,** ³³ **but whoever denies me before men, I also will deny before my Father who is in heaven.**

On your journey on the way to the second coming of Christ, you have the duty to acknowledge Christ before men. When you acknowledge Him before men you have Him as your advocate before the Father in heaven (10.32). If you deny Him before men, you have Him as prosecutor before the Father in heaven (10.33). *Thus, you all share in spreading the apostolic message, by testifying to what they preached. You all have a share in gospel mission.* What they announced then, you acknowledge now. What they preached to the Gentiles then metaphorically (with Israelites become Gentiles in prophetic metaphor), you acknowledge now among the nations literally.

The context for doing this joint work of confessing Christ is your Father's providential care. Enemies who can kill the body should not cause you to fear. God is the one to fear who saves and judges whole persons, body and soul. He is your Father. You are more valuable than the sparrows that He knows. Therefore, confess Christ knowing that Christ is your advocate by the Father's love to you as well.

Thus, learning is for living and it is also for sharing (**10.27, What I tell you in the dark, say in the light, and what you hear whispered, proclaim on the housetops**). There is learning in the dark of things whispered in the ear that is for proclaiming in the light and to ears everywhere and anywhere. Jesus gave us the gospel as mustard seed that the apostles gave us as a full grown plant by the gift of His Spirit.

3A. Live evangelistically

In relation to outsiders, you need to display the kind of speech that is encouraging, inviting, and tasty (Col. 4.5-6, ⁵ **Conduct yourselves wisely toward outsiders, making the best use of the time.** ⁶ **Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how you ought to answer each person**)

Consider the needs of your neighbors and speak with them graciously and kindly. Again, recall the Lord's first recorded word after His exaltation: greetings. Our king shows hospitality!

4A. Pray evangelistically

You pray in accord with the commission when you pray for laborers into the harvest: **Then he said to his disciples, "The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; ³⁸ therefore pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest"** (Mat. 9.37-38).

You fulfill your commission by praying for the coming of the kingdom (**Your kingdom come**, Mat. 6 10.a).

You help the pastor do his work by your prayers (2 Cor. 1.11). The center of his duty in disciple-making is teaching the whole counsel of God (Acts 20.20, 27). That includes a duty to "do the work of an evangelist" (2 Tim. 4.5). That is, it includes the duty of taking the gospel to the nations, to all people everywhere as he is able. Thus, you help the pastor by your prayers when you pray that God will give him boldness and clarity (Col 4.4; Eph. 6.19) in his entire work of going to the nations, baptizing repentant sinners, and instructing disciples in Christian living. Of course, his work at its core is the work of the word and prayer for Christ's lambs.

You pray evangelistically in promotion of the great commission when you ask God for an open *door for the word*, for *His open door* for the word (Col. 4.3, **pray also for us, that God may open to us a door for the word, to declare the mystery of Christ**).

Concluding remarks

1) You have a place in the fulfillment of the great commission

You have a significant and meaningful place in the realization of the greatest work on earth. When you absorb this fact into your heart, you will find encouragement; this fact will lift your spirit. Like me, many of you may think of yourself, sometimes, as just a little nail on the little toe of the left foot in the body of Christ. You and I need to remove the word "just" from this statement: "I am just a little..." There is nothing "just" or "mere" about it. Consider how Paul unpacks our place in fulfillment in 1 Corinthians 12.12-27:

¹² For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. ¹³ For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body- Jews or Greeks, slaves or free- and all were made to drink of one Spirit. ¹⁴ For the body does not consist of one member but of many. ¹⁵ If the foot should say, "Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body," that would not make it any less a part of the body. ¹⁶ And if the ear should say, "Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body," that would not make it any less a part of the body. ¹⁷ If the whole body were an eye, where would be the sense of hearing? If the whole body were an ear, where would be the sense of smell? ¹⁸ But as it is, God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose. ¹⁹ If all were a single member, where would the body be? ²⁰ As it is, there are many parts, yet one body. ²¹ The eye cannot say to the hand, "I have no need of you," nor again the head to the feet, "I have no need of you." ²² On the contrary, the parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, ²³ and on those parts of the body that we think less honorable we bestow the greater honor, and our unpresentable parts are treated with greater modesty, ²⁴ which our more presentable parts do not require. But God has so composed the body, giving greater honor to the part that lacked it, ²⁵ that there may be no division in the body, but that the members may have the same care for one another. ²⁶ If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together. ²⁷ Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it.

You are individually members of the body of Christ and your place is indispensable (v. 22). Not every one can be an eye or an ear; there must be diversity to make the body function properly. Even if your role seems to be small, humble, or hidden, you are the new covenant community of Christ; you are a local expression of the body of Christ (v. 27, **you are the body of Christ and individually members of it**). No one can rightly say of himself **I do not belong** (v. 15). No one can rightly say of another believer **I have no need of you** (v. 21). Thus, you, each one of you, have a significant place and role in the fulfillment of the greatest of all commissions. You have God's word on it. If your place seems small, if it is small, it cannot be insignificant. It is only possible for it to be insignificant if it is possible for a healthy sane person to rip off the little toe of his left foot and cast it away saying "you do not belong, you are no good, and you have no place here!" In other words, it is impossible for you as a baptized disciple to have no place of significance in the body of Christ. For you who are learning how to obey, it is inconceivable that you have a meaningless place in the fulfillment of His great teaching commission.

It may be that at times that we lose our grasp on our place in fulfilling the great commission. More often than not, this is due to the fact that we have dropped our guard and we are not learning how to obey as we should.

You have an indispensable place in the realization of disciple making in both its inreach and its outreach *by God's sovereign appointment (God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose, v. 18)*. Churches and church members come in all sizes and shapes. There are fat churches, thin churches, tall, and short churches. They are all composed of sinner-saints. They all have pluses and minuses. They all have failures. Nonetheless, the size and shape, and the gifts and limitations of gifts result in local churches and individual members *shaped by the sovereign working of God*. Each has its function in the body and each need to do its work with a good conscience while continually seeking to inform the conscience.

Your place in the disciple making task is set by the providence of God. The Lord decided the time in history of your birth, the place of your birth, your parents, your siblings. He decided your potential within the limits of your sinful nature in conjunction with His sanctifying grace. All of these things determine how you function in the body in fulfilling the great commission. In other words, Jesus decides your task. The result is that your sovereign Lord has you where He has you at this time on your journey in the disciple making process (to the end of the age) *for your good* (Rom. 8.28, **And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose, NASB**). And wonder of wonders, He works all things for your good for the supreme goal of His glory. Therefore, your life has linkage, unbreakable linkage with the chief end of man, which is to glorify God (Rom. 11.36).

2) Therefore, keep on keeping on in the work of the great commission

It is encouraging to know that the Lord Jesus builds His church without failure; He effectually calls His people out from the nations. His sovereignty as Sabbath Lord calls for obedience in the use of all the means that He appoints. We must always have this goal of learning and learning to obey in front of us.

Therefore, consider every person you meet as a person in need of restoration in the image of God. Ponder their true need of Christ and restoration in His image. Accordingly, you should always be on the look out for opportunities to share the gospel with unbelievers, worldview to worldview. Part of acknowledging Christ before men is being ready to answer those who ask you about your hope (1 Pet. 3.16; Col. 4.6). This readiness comes through *learning from the Lord Jesus* as your prophet, priest, and king (Mat. 11.28-30) through His appointed means of pastoral care (via apostles then and pastors now).

Therefore, pray evangelistically and live evangelistically.

Take up the means of learning at the feet of the risen Lord Jesus in order to obey Him in all you do. Thus, you gain strength in doing good works on behalf of all men especially to those of the household of faith (Gal. 6.10).

You should give the apostolic message priority and primacy because that teaching is the word of the Holy Spirit. You need to keep on keeping on and therefore you should help one another and encourage one another in the work of gospel mission that has learning at its center. Disciples show love in how they learn! Help your pastor serve you in gospel mission. Help him spread the word by how you receive it both publicly and from house to house. You are to do all of these things with a sense of duty to walk worthy of your calling and with diligent use of the means that God has appointed for the spread of the gospel.

In the end you have this marvelous promise: today you are a little flock, but tomorrow you will be the world because Jesus builds the church with all authority over the centuries, across the globe, and to the very end of the age.

To the Lord Jesus our exalted Sabbath king and universal sovereign be all glory both now and forevermore, amen.