

Supernatural

Matthew 28:18-20, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. 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, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age."

Question: What is the mission of the Church?

Key Verses: 2 Cor 5:20, Mark 16:15-16; Luke 24:45-49; John 20:21-23; Acts 1:8.

Global evangelism is not *our* mission. It is *God's* mission. It is merely our CO-mission. Hence, we call it the "Great Commission". We are not trying to evangelize the world. We are merely trying to partner with God in what he is already doing in our midst to rescue the world he loves. As Jesus said three years earlier, "Do you not say, 'There are yet four months, then comes the harvest'? Look, I tell you, lift up your eyes, and see that the fields are white for harvest" (John 4:35). God is on the make. This is a crucial concept for Christians. The world is not your responsibility; it is God's. Ours is merely to be available to go where God needs you to go and be who you already are, influencing those who you already have a relationship with. That is the implication of the Greek word "go". It could literally be rendered, "as you are going." In other words, "As you go about your business, remember to make Jesus famous." Let's not make this weird by managing a program of evangelism. We don't need marketing skills, salesman personalities, or professorial answers to people's questions. We simply need to follow Jesus and help others walk along with you. The Great Commission is no more complex than disciples who reproduce themselves.

This is not to say the Great Commission is no big deal. It is to say that it is not complicated. It is a big deal. In fact, all four Evangelists have their own renditions of Jesus' last mandate, as does the Apostle Paul. These are worth recording here:

Mark 16:15-16, "And he said to them, 'Go into all the world and proclaim the gospel to the whole creation. Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned.'"

Luke 24:47-49, "Repentance for the forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things. And behold, I am sending the promise of my Father upon you. But stay in the city until you are clothed with power from on high."

John 20:21-23, "As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you." And when he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you withhold forgiveness from any, it is withheld."

Acts 1:8, "You will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth."

2 Corinthians 5:20, “Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God.”

All of the Call

Clearly the Great Commission calls for “all-hands-on-deck”. Every Christian, in every vocation, at all times is a participant in expanding God’s global enterprise. How? It seems so intimidating to share our faith. What if someone asks us a questions we don’t know? What if my life falls short of the good example to back up my words? What if my friends reject me or I lose my job? These are all valid questions that Jesus dealt with in the “All of the Call”.

“**All Authority** has been given to me.” Jesus said that. Because he was God’s son, because he sacrificed his life, because he was sinless, because he rose from the dead and ascended into heaven, he was seated on God’s throne. He not only rules the world; he is the arbiter of eternity and the ultimate judge. That’s who Jesus is. When we enter into his service we carry his authority. As his ambassadors our words carry his weight. Paul makes that clear in 2 Corinthians 5:20. Consequently, we have the authority to actually offer forgiveness of sins on Jesus’ behalf. Obviously, we can only do that through his authorized channels of grace through faith. In other words, we cannot offer forgiveness to anyone who does not pledge allegiance to Jesus. Nonetheless, let’s not miss the magnitude. We offer God’s grace through Jesus’ blood. This is not the job of a priest or bishop. It is the right and responsibility of every Christ follower. Our declarations, enacted in immersion, are not empty pageantry. Ambassadors bear the weight of the government that authorizes them. They can declare war or peace. So too you can declare a person a friend of God or his enemy based on their response to Jesus.

So if someone asks you a question you can’t answer that does little to affect the declaration you are able to make. What if it is an essential question? Well, what would you do as an Ambassador at a foreign bargaining table? Imagine you are sitting at a conference table with foreign leaders. They ask about a process of peace. You don’t know the answer, you’re your president is listening in on a conference call. Do you not suppose he would send you an email or shoot you a text with the proper response? Of course. This is precisely the situation with evangelism. In the midst of evangelism, we cling to this promise: “When they deliver you over, do not be anxious how you are to speak or what you are to say, for what you are to say will be given to you in that hour. For it is not you who speak, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you,” (Matthew 10:19-20). If our concern for answers keeps us from sharing our story it is because we lack faith in Jesus to keep his word. There is no way God is going to abandon you if you open your mouth. Why? Because this is *His* mission and *your* commission. He is more committed to the process than we will ever be.

“Make disciples of **all nations**.” One of the most extraordinary things about Jesus is his global aspirations. You probably couldn’t have predicted that during his three-year ministry. After all, he never openly received a Gentile. It always came with hesitation or outright

resistance. He never ordered his itinerants into foreign soil prior to his death. He never traveled outside the traditional boundaries of Israel. So why all of a sudden does he aim at Global Conquest? The fact of the matter is that Jesus always had that in mind. He started with his own people and culture because the nation of Israel was the hope of the world. Nonetheless, even at the earliest stages of his ministry, Jesus' ministry was always centripetal. His healings, preaching, and commands always push us further and further away from the center.

This is a stark contrast to virtually every other religious tradition that drives its adherents ever inward. Through deeper devotion, thicker rituals, or higher knowledge, the disciple of Islam, or Judaism, or Buddhism, or whatever religion, finds a central position in the religious hierarchy. Christianity, in counter distinction, is the opposite. It is our outward focus through social service and proclamation, through evangelism and cultural care that fulfills our deepest calling in Christ Jesus. That is part of the world-altering shock of this Great Commission.

“Teaching them to observe **all that I have commanded** you.” This is at first overwhelming. Who can possibly remember, let alone obey, all the commands of Jesus? Then one recalls a conversation twice repeated in Jesus' ministry about the greatest commandments. Both times Jesus summarizes the totality of the Old Testament law in two brief commands: Love God; Love people. Simple to remember; impossible to perfect. That's why it requires teaching. The rules are not hard to remember; they are terribly tough to fulfill. The role of the Christian (every single one) is to help someone else move one step forward in each of these commands. It is the role of the mother with her children, the father with his wife, the employer with his workers, the coach with his players. Wherever God places you, your purpose is clear. Model and mentor at least one person to take at least one step. If all of us do just that, this commission would become a reality in our lifetimes.

Lest we think this is too much to ask, Jesus added to the commission a promise. And behold, **I am with you always**, to the end of the age.” Because this is God's mission and our commission, he is fully prepared to be fully present. Jesus himself will continue his incarnation through the Holy Spirit who will guide, chide, and provide the wisdom, power, and opportunities we require to make him famous world over and next door. It is the completion of this command that ushers in the new age of eternity. When our full obedience fulfills his commission his presence will become tangible and our troubles will meet the end of time.

Make Disciples

This little paragraph packs a powerful punch. It is a single sentence with only one verb. That verb happens to be an imperative. It is not “baptize”. That's not our command. Nor is it “go.” We may or may not be sent to far flung places. The singular command of this commission is to “Make Disciples.” The command comes with considerable freight to be sure. There are shelves of books on discipleship. All kinds of authors argue for all kinds of methods, processes, or approaches. There are mountains of ideas about the doctrines to be taught, the habits to

form, or the strategies to implement. Most of these ideas can be helpful. Many of the books are insightful. Nonetheless, right here, right now, let's not overly complicate the issue. In a single sentence: A disciple is a "learner"—a student, so to speak. However, the particular type of learning the Jewish culture had in mind had less to do with information and much to do with transformation. It was more about behavior than books. It is what we would call mentoring or life-coaching. A "learner" would follow, imitate, and repeat the practices a mentor would model. That is the core of the commission and it is the obligation of every single Christ-follower.

Though all of us are at different levels of maturity, all of us have someone who looks up to us. For some it is a child, for others an athlete, for others a newbie at work. We can each leverage those relationships to help someone else walk a bit closer to Christ. That is not merely a universal opportunity, it is an absolute obligation. Before Jesus left this earth he gave us one last command. The "all of the call" means that each one reach one. From the moment one drips dry in the baptistery until we cross the threshold of eternity, our commission—our partnership with God—is to make Jesus famous. It is our prayer that when we finally fulfill it, Jesus himself will return with our reward.

Key Points:

- The Great Commission is God's mission, not ours.
- This command is universal—all authority to reach all people, in all places, at all times.
- Our prime directive is to make disciples by mentoring another into loyalty for Jesus.

Action Step: Identify by name one person you could take at least one step closer to Jesus.

Further Resources: Bill Bright, *How You Can Help Fulfill the Great Commission* (1999).