

THE GREAT COMMISSION

Matthew 28:18-20 is perhaps the most well-known version of the Great Commission but each of the Gospels expresses it in different ways. In Mark 16:15-18, for instance, we are told to **Go into the entire world and preach the gospel to all creation** (all people). In Matthew 28:18-20, the instruction is to **Go and make disciples of all nations** (all peoples). I believe that the Holy Spirit inspired each writer of the Gospel to write in the way they did. I also believe that what they wrote was in line with what Jesus commanded them. So the command therefore is to go into the world to preach the gospel to every creature, and to make disciples of all nations

The Great Commission is the Abrahamic Covenant

It is interesting to note that the early Apostles of the New Testament writers never referred directly to the Great commission, as Jesus gave it in Matthew 28:18-20, but they did refer many times to the Abrahamic Covenant in reference to preaching the gospel to the entire world (see Acts 3:24-26 and Galatians 3: 8). They knew Jesus was not giving something new when He gave the Great Commission, but that He was reaching back two thousand years, taking hold of the Covenant God gave to Abraham and his seed, and presenting it to the Church, entrusting its blessings and calling to them.

The Great Commission in the Old Testament

Genesis 12:1-4 tells us a story of God's covenant with Abraham. This covenant is made up of two elements, or blessings:

i. He will be blessed and God will make His name great. This promise was in Abraham's time and later on, to the nation of Israel.

ii. **"And all people on earth will be blessed through you"**

This is a promise of the redemption of all nations. This is the Great Commission; God's plan of redemption of all nations. Paul alludes to it in Galatians 3:8 saying, **"Scripture foresaw that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, and announce the gospel in advance to Abraham; 'All nations will be blessed through you.'"**

God's plan for Abraham and the nation of Israel was that they would be a nation that would reach out to all nations with the gospel, the good news about God's Kingdom. This is way in which they were to be a blessing to all nations. Unfortunately the nation of Israel was never interested in carrying the Great Commission. They failed to carry God's mission for the world; to evangelize the world.

Jesus Christ is the fulfilment of the Great Commission.

Jesus came to earth and not only fulfilled where the nation of Israel failed, He carried the Great Commission by breaking cultural and racial boundaries, for the sake of reaching out to the unreached groups (the story of the Samaritan woman and also by establishing the headquarters of His ministry in Galilee, an area that had a lot of gentiles). He became a blessing not only to the nation of Israel, but also to all nations; through His death on the cross.

The meaning of the Great Commission in the New Testament and Now

The meaning of the Great Commission in the New Testament is therefore, God, through the church, blessing or bringing salvation to all the peoples/ nations of the earth. The Great Commission calls us, the church, to evangelism and discipleship; this is how we become a blessing to all nations.

- i. **It is a command to preach the good news of the gospel to all people.** This means world evangelism; reaching all people groups, more especially unreached people groups (Those places who have never heard the gospel). It also calls us to reach out to our non-Christian neighbours in our community and our sphere of influence.
- ii. **It is a command to make disciples and teaching and all Jesus has commanded.** This is the work of nurturing spiritual growth in believers by feeding them the word of God and teaching them to live in obedience to the instruction and teaching of Jesus Christ. We are children of the New Covenant Jesus is an authoritative New Covenant teacher whose divine instructions and teaching must be fully trusted, obeyed and lived.

As we evangelize and disciple, we must resemble the life, character, and mission of our master, Jesus, and the gospel must be part of who we are. Each one of us must become Christ to his/her neighbour.

If we want to know how we are doing in carrying the Great Commission, these are the questions we need to ask ourselves:

- I. How many people have I lead to Christ this year? How many people have I shared the gospel with?
- II. Do I have time to nurture, encourage, and mentor new Christians?
- III. Who is discipling me? Who challenges me spiritually, who am I accountable to besides Christ and my Pastor?
- IV. Am I actively involved in evangelism and discipleship ministries in my local church? Can I confidently say I am a blessing to all nations?

Application

- i. Participate in evangelism. Find out what the church is doing about evangelism or how she is carrying the Great Commission.
- ii. Use the sphere of influence that the Lord has given you to reach non-Christians and to disciple other Christians without abusing your power, your position and your employer's time.
- iii. Be committed to the life of the local church and engage in the worship service and ministries of the church. Read your Bible regularly, attend bible study and discipleship training, run to those things that will nurture your spiritual growth, so that you may grow and become a matured disciple who is fit to disciple others.
- iv. Support missionaries in your local or wider church or Missions organizations. Join or support evangelism and discipleship programs in your local or wider church.

Conclusion

As we seek to preach the good news of the kingdom we may find wondering which of Jesus' two most important commands we should give the most emphasis - the Great Commission or the Great Commandment. The Great Commandment has often been thought of as 'good works', expressing God's love and concern for everyday issues and struggles through relief and development and caring for the homeless and the orphaned. The Great Commission, on the other hand, has been thought of as meeting people's spiritual needs through evangelism and church planting.

But can one truly exist without the other? Can the Great Commandment be a true expression of love if the eternal condition of the poor and the needy is overlooked? Can the Great Commission be a true and accurate expression of God's love if it fails to respond to human need?

This is how Jesus did it; He seamlessly joined the Great commandment and the Great Commission; He forgave the sins of the repentant and fed the hungry; He taught the word of God and healed the sick and demon possessed; He challenged His hearers to full discipleship and restored and only son back to a grieving mother; He reached out to an unreached people group with the promise of a well of water that would never run dry!

Our ministries may emphasize one area more than another, due to our giftings and ministry focus. However, as a whole, Christ's Body, the Church, must continue to display to the world the holistic gospel – Christ's love expressed, in all dimensions, towards human need and towards a lost spiritual condition.

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