

A Great Companion for the Great Commission

Matthew 28:16-20

You might be wondering why we're turning to this passage again, since Matt shared from this passage last week, but often when we focus on the Great Commission, we focus on the command that Jesus gave his disciples to go. This morning rather than focus on the command that Jesus gave us, I want to focus on the promise Jesus gave us, the promise contained in verse 20. **Read and pray.**

It's no accident that Jesus closes the Great Commission with a great promise – in fact there is no great promise in all the world than Jesus' promise to be with us always – right to the end of the age. The other night Janice and I went with Mike and Linda to a Michael Card concert and Michael shared a lot of my message that night, but he said, *God's greatest desire is to be with us, and the cool thing about that is that our greatest need is to be with God. His greatest desire intersects with our greatest need.*

We were created for fellowship with God – Adam walked with God in garden in the cool of the day and we've longed for that kind of intimate fellowship with our Creator ever since. Jesus promises us that fellowship – “behold, I am with you always...”.

It is a promise that is at the very core of the gospel. The gospel of Matthew ends with this promise, but it begins with it as well, as the angel tells Joseph that the baby born to Mary will be called Emmanuel, *God with us*. The staggering message of Christmastime is a baby born who was God *with us*. This last promise of Matthew tells us that for Christians, when Jesus left, he didn't abandon us. He didn't leave us orphans alone. Through the Holy Spirit, Jesus didn't leave, he will always be with us. And not just in a figurative or sentimental sense. Jesus is alive and he's with us – in a very real and personal way, right here, right now, all the time, Jesus is with us. He promises.

Title: A Great Companion on the Great Commission

1. Jesus is with us as we obey the Great Commission

It's impossible to disconnect our Lord's promise to be with us from his command to go. It's not a thought that Jesus tagged on at the end, it's the completion of the thought. Listen to how the Great Commission command gathers momentum as it goes: Jesus says make disciples of all nations and baptize them and teach them to obey all that I commanded you. *And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.*

Essentially what Jesus is saying is, “Go! And as you go, I will be with you always – even to the end of the age.” The promise is linked with the command. Don't get me wrong, Jesus doesn't abandon us if we're not actively laboring in the Great Commission, and that labor can certainly take different forms, but it's impossible to avoid the realization that Jesus means for his people to be about the Great Commission, and he means to be with us as we are.

How does church planting have to do with the Great Commission?

This past week I was reading a facebook post and someone asked a good question. They wrote, *why is it that when people talk about obeying the Great Commission they always talk about church planting?* It's a good and honest question, and my answer would be that as you look at the early church from the book of Acts forward, the way they seemed to obey the Great Commission was all wrapped up in planting churches. How could it not? As you make disciples, you have to have healthy churches to plant those disciples in. The church is the context for making disciples – disciples making disciples. And so planting churches and building churches are just going to be an essential part of fulfilling the Great Commission.

Last week Matt shared a message called *Why I Want to Plant a Church*, and Matt and Siobhan and their family leave for Florida tomorrow to plant a church in Sarasota. At the close of the service we'll be calling them up so we can pray for them. What compels them to leave this church and home that they've known for 7 years is the Great Commission. They sense the Lord calling them to go make disciples by planting a church in Sarasota. There are lives waiting to be transformed by the power of the gospel preached and displayed through a church plant that doesn't exist right now but will soon. And we at GCC have the privilege to send them out as they "go". We look forward to remaining connected with the Slacks and keeping them in our prayers and supporting them financially and hearing all about how God is working in Bridgeway Church to bring many to Christ. And sharing with them all that God is doing here as we also "go" to make disciples – not leaving the area, but by going to a new building and a new neighborhood and reaching out to our community with a new energy and commitment. In a few months we'll be sending Rick and Becky Jeror out with our love and prayers as they relocate to Sarasota to join the Bridgeway church planting team.

Whether we go by going or go by staying, Jesus calls us all to go. And he promises us that as we go, he will be with us.

2. Jesus is with us to empower us to do the Great Commission

Jesus is not only with us as we obey the Great Commission, but he is with us to equip us to fulfill the Great Commission. Without him, we can do nothing, but having him with us makes all the difference, and brings a strong encouragement to our souls that will keep our souls buoyant even in the hardest of times. That encouragement takes many forms and I want to share three forms that it takes in our souls.

A. We can have great courage knowing that Jesus is with us

Listen, we need courage to obey God. We don't hear that said very often, but it's true. Did you know that among those not allowed in the Kingdom of God are cowards? Listen to Rev. 21:8: *But as for the cowardly, the faithless, the detestable, as for murderers, the sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars, their portion will be in the lake that burns with fire and sulfur, which is the second death.* (Rev. 21:8)

But that doesn't mean that anyone who struggles with fear won't be allowed into the kingdom of heaven. Far from it! In fact, the most frequent command in the bible isn't *love one another*, or *have no idols before God*, or *don't commit adultery*. The most frequent command in the bible is "don't be afraid". God knows that fear is a big issue for His people. And often God says that in the context of calling his servant to do some particular assignment where the servant is going to come head to head with fear. Joshua is a excellent example of this. As God calls Joshua to lead in place of Moses (some pretty big shoes to fill) He calls him to be strong and courageous and also calls him not to be afraid, and both times God gives this reassuring promise: "for I will be with you." God's presence is the ultimate antidote for fear.

Courage isn't the absence of fear – it's the refusal of letting fear stop us from doing what we supposed to do. As John Wayne said, "*Courage is being scared to death, but saddling up anyway.*" Jesus commands us to "go" – to saddle up – by being disciples making disciples with all the potential risks that come with that assignment. But as we saddle up, Jesus promises us that he is saddling up with us.

B. We can have great confidence knowing that Jesus is with us

Thom Rainer has a new book out called, *Why Nobody Wants To Go To Church Anymore*. That's a discouraging title – especially if you're planting a church. But the fact is that many people are disillusioned and uninterested in the church, or think it's irrelevant and disconnected with their lives. How can we build churches, how can we plant churches, when that's the current of attitude towards the church?

We can do it with great confidence, not in who we are, but because of who is with us. Jesus doesn't begin the Great Commission by telling his disciples what to do; he begins it by telling them who he is: "*All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. 19 Go therefore...*"

Because of who Jesus is, and because he is with us, we can have great confidence that our work will not be in vain. Our confidence isn't in ourselves – we can't do anything in our own strength. Our confidence isn't in how well we can market the church or Jesus. God has called us to a way harder work than creating a product or environment that people like. He's called us to make disciples – we are in the work of saving souls, but we can't do it – at least not alone.

Sad news

I was reading on FB the other day when I read a post that really hit me hard. One of the few friends that I remember from High School, Billy Haley, committed suicide last week. Billy was always quick to laugh and joke. I invited him to a youth bible study and he came out and afterwards in my well intentioned zeal I tried to get him to pray a prayer to receive Christ. I basically talked him into it and he prayed with me but he didn't try to pretend it was sincere.

I haven't talked or heard from Billy since high school. I don't know what his life was like or what brought him to such a tragic choice, but I know this: he needed Jesus. All around us there are Billy Haley's who need more than a program or a presentation or pressure to pray a prayer – they need God. They need the power of God to set them free from bondage to sin. They need the power of God to deliver them from oppression of the enemy. They need the love of God to fill the empty places in their hearts and give them a reason to live. They need Jesus with them. How can we make a difference in people's lives when they need supernatural power to save them?

Our confidence is in Jesus. All authority in heaven and earth belongs to him. There's no power and no authority that is above him – and he is with us. As the Slacks head south and join Jordan and Jenn, as Rick and Becky join them in a few months, to plant Bridgeway, they can go with confidence because Jesus will be with you. As we head into a new future with a new building but also weakened by the loss of the Slack's and their ministry and care here, we can go with confidence because Jesus will be with us.

I believe that one of the reasons Jesus ends the Great Commission with the promise that he will be with us always even to the end of the age was to fill our hearts with confidence. We do things differently when we have confidence than when we don't. When we don't have confidence we tend to step gingerly, we are timid, we are more likely to turn back when things get a little choppy. Confidence doesn't just propel us forward, it propels us forward *differently*. We do things differently when we're filled with confidence.

Jesus propels his disciples forward differently. Not with self-confidence but Christ-confidence. He is with us; he will always be with us, and not just to catch us when we fall. He is with us to empower us for the Great Commission and to help us succeed – which in biblical terms is called *bearing fruit*. This propels us forward differently: instead of praying that God keep us safe, we pray and ask God to use us to do great things in His power and for His glory. That's what Paul prayed at the end of Eph. 3:

Now to him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us, 21 to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen.

We can pray big things but God is able to do far more than the biggest prayers we can think up. That propels us forward differently. Instead of witnessing to someone timidly, sure that they have no interest in the gospel, we can speak boldly knowing that they need Jesus and that Jesus is with us to empower our

frail words and ridiculously inadequate efforts so that they lodge in the person's heart with a staying power that isn't eloquence, it's the Spirit. To that end Paul enlists the prayers of the Ephesian church in chapter 6:

To that end keep alert with all perseverance, making supplication for all the saints, 19 and also for me, that words may be given to me in opening my mouth boldly to proclaim the mystery of the gospel, 20 for which I am an ambassador in chains, that I may declare it boldly, as I ought to speak.

C. We can take great comfort because Jesus is with us

There is a tremendous comfort in Jesus' words, *behold I am with you always even to the end of the age* and I believe that Jesus meant them to be comforting to us. Jesus knew there would be hard times in our lives. He knew there would be trials and heartaches. The Christian life is far from the trouble-free and heartache-free life.

But when our hearts are sad, or struggling, or overwhelmed, we can find great comfort knowing that Jesus is with us. He won't leave us. When times get tough for Bridgeway – and they will – you can know that Jesus is with you always. When we go through tough times here at GCC – and we will – we can know that Jesus is with us always. When any of us individually go through hard times, trials, lonely times, there is rich comfort for the soul knowing that Jesus is with you and will never, ever leave you.

The comfort of the Lord isn't always aimed at making us comfortable. There's a big difference between comfort and comfortable. Comfort is much better, much deeper, much more beneficial to our souls. It is knowing that Jesus is with us *in* the discomfort, and that is enough. And that Jesus is with us to do his good work in us and through us during this short time we have on planet earth before he returns or we go to be with him.

There is a bittersweet aspect to this morning as we say goodbye to a family that has grown very dear to us. There is sadness in saying goodbye, but we are so excited about how God is going to use you guys and we are *confident* that God is going to bear much gospel fruit through your lives and through Bridgeway. And we have the great comfort of knowing that as the Slack's head to Florida, Jesus goes with them. And as we continue to serve the Lord here, minus an excellent pastor and wife and family, Jesus will be staying here with us. And we will be connected relationally and spiritually with each other because we are all one in Christ.

Because Jesus is with us, we have great courage, great confidence, and great comfort as we seek to obey the Great Commission together. We have a Great Companion for the Great Commission.