



God's Mission: What Jesus Wants Us to Know As We Go

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May our Lord come quickly, when we will be gathered with people from every tribe, tongue and nation to worship the worthy Lamb. Our guest preacher this morning is not a guest to us—he is a member of our church, the husband of Peggy Newell. He and Peggy together lead a Care Group in our church family. He's also part of our GO Team. What you might not know about Marv and Peggy is that they have served many years as missionaries—first in Indonesia and now as the director of a mission network of different evangelical mission agencies called Missio Nexus.

Through their work in Indonesia and the many different evangelical mission agencies, along with their travels around the world, they have gained broad exposure, experience and knowledge of the present state of evangelical missions around the world. Marv has a passion for the advancement of the gospel. It was his passion for missions and the missionaries of our church that initially planted the idea of having our first New Covenant Bible Church Missions Conference. We're so thankful for all the work Marv has done in giving direction to this conference. Let's express our thanks together to Marv Newell as we welcome him to the pulpit.

Introduction by David Sunday

It is a joy to share with you about God's mission in the world today. The topic or theme of our mission conference has been, "God's Mission: Our Vision." We've heard the vision of our mission to the world come through the vision our individual missionaries as they have shared during the different sessions and as we see the work that's going on around the globe. However, what we need to do is go back to God's Word and hear what Jesus Himself taught about our mission in the world today.

I grew up in an evangelical church back in New Jersey. We had a tradition or event we would do every once in a while called a progressive dinner. In a progressive dinner, a small group within the church—such as a care group, Sunday School class or choir—would get together and go from house to house to have a dinner together all evening in different locations. You'd get in your car and show up at the first house where you'd have the hors d'oeuvres and maybe some punch. You'd go off to the next house and have the soup or salad. Then you'd go to the next house where you would all eat the main meal together. Finally, you'd go to another house and have dessert. Most of you have probably done that in the past. The progressive dinner was a sweet evening of fellowship together, taking time to enjoy each other as we progressively enjoyed that meal together.

If you're following the Bible reading program we're doing as a church, this past week you read the Great Commission passages that Jesus gave His disciples. You saw them at the end of each of the Gospels—Matthew, Mark, Luke, John—and in the first chapter of Acts. As you read them, you may have been confused thinking, “Are these all synoptic?” which means Jesus gave the Great Commission one time and these men wrote it down the way they heard it. Or you might have asked, “How do we piece all these together because one of them says you're to go to Galilee while another says to stay in Jerusalem? How does that all fit together?”

It can be very confusing unless we see the chronological order in which they were originally presented. Just like the progressive supper where you progressively, incrementally and sequentially eat the meal together, Jesus gave these five Great Commission passages sequentially and incrementally as well.

Over 40 days—starting with the evening of His resurrection right up to the day He ascended into Heaven—Jesus took time to take the disciples through a school of world missions. In five different settings Jesus gave the Great Commission passages with their five different emphases so the disciples would be able to take time to learn it, progressively understand it and therefore be able to engage in it once He had left them.

On Friday night, we sat together and within an hour we had consumed the meal—it was done and gone. That's not the way the Great Commission passages are to be understood and read. I would like us to go chronologically through these passages as Jesus gave them and understand the emphasis that comes from each passage so we would know that we are also on track with our mission as we go and take the message of the gospel to the world.

If you look through this outline, you'll see the passages but you'll notice they are not in the biblical order starting with Matthew and going through Acts because that was not the order in which Jesus gave them to the disciples. Rather, they are in chronological order as Jesus gave them so we can see the progression as Jesus gave this commission to the disciples and ultimately to us as a church.

1. The Model of Mission—John 20:21

Take your Bibles and turn to John 20:21 where we discover the first time Jesus gave the Great Commission—on the evening of His resurrection. The very first time He meets up with the disciples, He states a very, very short commission: *“Jesus said to them again, ‘Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you.’”* That’s about all He said that night. In the past, people were supposed to come to Jerusalem; drawn into Jerusalem like a magnet to hear the message of God. Jesus didn’t give a lot of detail but simply said, “Now We’re going to send you somewhere to proclaim the gospel.”

I have a key word for each of these passages that all start with “M.” First of all, what we see in this passage (John 20:21) is the **model of mission—Jesus Himself**. He says, “Look at Me. As the Father has sent Me so send I you—in the same way I performed mission, the same way I lived among you,.” Jesus’ life became the impeccable model for everything as we engage the world—character, morals, ethnical behavior and performance. Everything we do should be modeled after the life of Christ and no messenger of Jesus will ever be embarrassed, ashamed or wonder if he’s living out the message if he follows the model of Jesus. Jesus says to us, “As the Father has sent Me—look at My life as a model—that’s the way I’m sending you into the world as well.”

A.W. Tozer said, “The first priority of the church is not to spread the gospel of Christ. The first priority of the church is to make the church worthy of spreading the message of Jesus Christ.” Therefore, character is everything when it comes to engaging the world for Jesus Christ.

During the men’s breakfast, we had a panel of four missionaries. At the end of the panel discussion, the moderator asked them, “What is one prayer request we can take as we leave?” Every one of them focused their requests on their character and conduct. They know, as we know, that their lives must live up to the message we proclaim.

In about any other field, the character of the person who you work with doesn't really matter that much—at least not to the job they're performing. As we take the message of Christ and hand it out to the world, compare that to the mailman (or mail-lady) who comes to your mail box. I don't stand at the mail box as he or she drives up with the mail, asking, "Before I take this mail from you, I'm going to ask you about your character. Did you beat your wife or husband last night? Are you on drugs? Are you a drunkard? Are you immoral?" If the questions are answered right, then I'll take the mail. No. Obviously, it's pretty ludicrous to think we would care about the character of our postal carrier.

When it comes to our mission to the world, character is everything. We measure the validity of our message by the way we live out its standards. If there's any principle we see from this first message Jesus gave in the Great Commission it is, "If you don't believe in the messenger, you won't believe the message." Character is so important and Jesus began on that point so we would know we're qualified or disqualified to herald His message just by the way we live our lives.

2. The Magnitude of the Task—Mark 16:15

About eight days later, Jesus meets with the disciples a second time. They're still in Jerusalem celebrating the Passover which was an eight day festival. They haven't gone back to Galilee yet so we get a little glimpse of what took place that night when Jesus talks to Thomas—who wasn't there the week before—and settles things with him. As He's with them Jesus gives these words to His disciples in Mark 16:15: "*Go into all the world and proclaim the gospel to the whole creation.*"

Here's where we see the **magnitude of the task**—"all the world." Jesus is telling His disciples that He's sending them on a global mission. "To all peoples and place on the face of the earth." No place is to be considered off limits for the Gospel to penetrate—the magnitude: into all the world geographically.

We might say that today the Gospel has geographically reached about all parts of the world. When you see the great geographical spans of Christianity, you might say, "Well, maybe we've accomplished the task." But it also says, "to every creature, *to the whole creation.*" The gospel message is to be proclaimed to everybody who lives within creation as well. Therefore it's not enough to geographically spread the gospel; we must make sure the gospel is within reach of every individual as well.

It's been statistically proven through a survey that today 85% of all Muslims, Buddhists and Hindus do not personally know a Christian. The reverse of that is also probably true. Eighty-five percent of us within this room probably do not know a Buddhist, Hindu or Muslim, who are the most unreached people in the world today. Obviously, we still have a lot to do to get the gospel out to all these people. You may say, "Well, maybe the internet is getting to them—or radio or television exposure." And all those things of course are happening but it takes a human being to win a human being when it comes down to really planting churches and making disciples.

Therefore, the scope of our mission or the magnitude of the task is given during the second encounter that Jesus had with the disciples. We need to remember there is no people group too distant, no country too difficult and no culture too different where the gospel of Jesus Christ is not to be heralded. We see there's still a lot to be done as we consider the great task before us.

3. The Methodology of Missions—Matthew 28:18-20

Jesus went on then about a week and a half later. It's hard to pinpoint the exact date for the next encounter Jesus had, but Matthew 28:18-20 gives us the third installment of the Great Commission to the disciples. The emphasis in this location is the **methodology of missions**. Jesus told His disciples to go and meet Him in Galilee. They had taken time to go to Galilee to see their families again. The episode in John 21 had just taken place. Jesus meets with the disciples on the sea, helps them catch fish and talks to Peter about "feeding My lambs." Now Jesus says, "Let's go up into the mountain and I'm going to tell you another part of the commission."

Matthew, a tax collector, takes copious notes and records. Maybe he even had a parchment and pen with him because the details we find within this Great Commission are very clear. He writes down what Jesus says to him. We have to start this passage in verse 18, starting with the authority of Jesus. Jesus says,

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.

There's a lot in this passage but for our purposes today, we want to see that Jesus is emphasizing the methods of mission. We dare not say we don't know how to go about the

mission Jesus gave us. He's given us the model, told us the magnitude of the past and now He's telling us the method—how it's to be done. The key phrase here is, *“make disciples of all nations.”* It doesn't take a rocket scientist to figure out what's going on in these verses. There are four verbs. One is imperative to which the other three are clinging. That verb is “make disciples.” Therefore the essence of our task—the essence of what we should be doing as a church through our outreach both locally and globally—is to *“make disciples of all nations.”*

I've been sitting on the Global Outreach team for about three years now and see pilots, Bible translators, hospital administrations and other specialists. But if we were to ask them, “What's the end goal of what you're trying to do as a missionary?” they would respond, “We're trying to make disciples of these people.”

How do you make disciples? The three other verbs here explicitly tell us how to make disciples.

- **Going**—penetrating into other people's cultures and areas that do not have the gospel. We send foot-soldiers into those areas.
- **Baptizing**—bringing them into relationship with the body of believers and with the church so they can be taught. The consolidation process is very important.
- **Teaching**— *“Teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you.”* Obviously, the discipleship program is part of what the Great Commission is all about. We do not simply “make a disciple” by bringing them from darkness into light and then just leaving them. But rather these verses tell us to bring them from darkness to light and then teach them—sending them on a lifelong process of becoming solid, Bible-believing believers. When Doug Dunton gave us his presentation during Sunday School, he explained why that ministry is so important.

Nominalism within Christianity around the world is rampant and needs the discipleship process. “Making disciples among the nations” is what we're to be doing.

Before we leave this passage, there's one more thing here we dare not forget. It also continues to talk about the magnitude of the task that Jesus talked about the week earlier. The word “nations” there means all the ethnic groups in the world. Today, there are 239 nations on the earth as you count them in the United Nations. You might say, “Well, we've already reached and discipled all the nations.” That's the way man divides humanity but God divides it according to people or ethnic groups. Now, there are 16,305 ethnic groups in

the world today. Nine-thousand of them have had exposure to the gospel; six-thousand are still waiting for a clear presentation of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

4. The Message of Missions—Luke 24:44-49

Jesus goes on and about a week later, they're back down in Jerusalem where we get to Luke 24:44-49. Jesus gives them the fourth installment of the Great Commission—the **message of missions**. In other words, He's telling them what we are supposed to say, what our message is and what we are to proclaim as we go into missions. Starting at verse 46, Jesus said this to the disciples: *"Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, and that repentance and forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations [all the ethnic groups], beginning from Jerusalem."* The essence of the gospel message is that the Messiah would come, die and rise again.

There's a lot of theology that could be unpacked from this passage but let's focus on two words that are most important to us: *"that repentance and forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in His name."* He mentions man's predicament—sin. It's not that man is ill, ill-equipped, ignorant, doesn't know enough or whatever excuses might be out there. Man is a fallen creature and fallen into sin, separating man from a Holy God. Jesus took care of that sinfulness when He died on the cross to save the world. But we dare not believe that because Jesus died for entire the world, the entire world is automatically saved. That's not what the Scriptures teach.

There must be a conscious choice on the part of the individual to believe and accept the provision of God through Jesus in order for his sins to be forgiven. Therefore, repentance is the core message of what we proclaim to the nations. "You must repent of your ways, turn, think differently, and have your worldview turned upside down. God has made provision for your salvation but you cannot do it yourself. All of your efforts, no matter how intense or regular, will never save you. You must believe and repent of your sins. Forgiveness of sins is the result of repentance and belief."

Every human being in the human race since the time of Adam needs forgiveness of sins. So many people will tell you they know something is missing in their lives—they feel dirty, corrupted, things aren't right. You will find wherever you go in the world people are saying, "No matter how hard I try to correct this, I can't!" This need is only corrected through Jesus. He gives forgiveness. We all need forgiveness because each one of us has

become an affront to God through our personal conduct. No matter where you go in the world—to the depths of the jungle in Brazil or to the highest mountains of Nepal in the Himalayas—you will not find a people group that has found some other way to reach God outside of what God has provided through Jesus Christ.

We need to dismiss the romantic view found in some churches that says, “Some people, somewhere, by some other means have some way to reach God outside of believing in a conscious faith in Jesus Christ.” That’s not true. Because of the message we proclaim, it is imperative to send our missionaries because the people groups must come to conscious faith in Jesus Christ. We find here that the conscience of every person who believes in this message can be cleansed and declared as if they had never sinned, if they simply believe that Jesus is the propitiation for their sin.

5. The Means of Mission—Acts 1:8

There is one more installment of the Great Commission. It’s been 40 days since Jesus rose from the dead and He’s with his disciples. They’re down in Jerusalem and Jesus is about ready to ascend into heaven. In Acts 1:8 we find the fifth Great Commission passage—the **means of mission**. Many of you have probably memorized this passage. *“But 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.”*

They are outside the city gates of Jerusalem on the Mount of Olives. The moment before Jesus ascended into Heaven, He gives this commission and in one sentence He gives three means for missions.

- **The Means of Human Instrumentality**—you and me.

Look at that verse again and you’ll see the word “you” three different times. *“You will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses...”* The choir sang about being witnesses to the ends of the earth. It’s absolutely true. God uses the means of human beings to save other human beings. There’s no other way. He’s not doing it through any other means because humans can best relate to other humans. We can sympathize with their needs and what they’re experiencing. He uses us to go and tell others about Jesus Christ.

Every single one of us is very, very important, no matter what level of mission God leads us to be engaged in. Whether you are one who prays for missions, helps to pay what it takes to have missions, participate in other ways, or even commit yourselves as full-time missionaries, God uses us as humans. The whole church, everyone at New Covenant Bible Church, is engaged in the mission of Christ to the world.

Someone might say, "Wait a minute! I've heard that Jesus is appearing to Muslims in dreams. Is He short-circuiting the Great Commission because He's going directly and saving Muslims through dreams?" The short answer is that God does not save anybody by dreams. I believe Jesus does encounter people through dreams but it simply sets them on the path of finding salvation through a human being who is going to explain it to them. It takes human beings to proclaim the message through whatever means we use as human beings to do that. There's no excuse, no other way and no short cut. The angels aren't doing it. Jesus isn't doing it. We as human beings are the ones who God is using to proclaim the message to others.

- **The Holy Spirit**

The second means in this passage is the Holy Spirit. We could take a whole course on the Holy Spirit but one thing to remember is that we are engaged in spiritual warfare and need spiritual power to encounter the forces of darkness. The Holy Spirit is that power. Let us not minimize that Person of the Godhead Who is kind of like "the absent God" in so many people's lives. We need to be empowered with the Holy Spirit.

- **Jesus' Geographic Strategic Plan**

He actually gives a geographic strategic plan as to how to go about it. *"...Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth."* He's saying how the mission is to unfold. Basically, He's not saying, "First Jerusalem, then Judea and Samaria, then the uttermost part of the earth." Those are not the conjunctions used. Rather, it's simultaneous. "Witness to these places all at the same time. Simultaneously, you are to be a witness in Jerusalem, but also those nearby and those far away." So it's here, near and over there. Our mission to the world is to all peoples no matter where they happen to be located.

Jesus makes it very clear that His mission is for all of us. He started out on the night of His resurrection and gave us the **model for mission**. Then a week later He gave us the **magnitude of the task**. Then, about a week and a half later He gave us the **methodology**. Then He gave us the **message**. Finally, just before He ascended into heaven, He gave us the **means** of missions. He left no stone unturned. There's nothing we can add to the missiology of Jesus that is more valid today than what He gave us in His own plan. That's why it is God's mission. We're on mission with God.

Threats to the Mission

Jesus told us very clearly what this mission is through five installments delivered over 40 days in a mission school with His disciples. I hope we have caught the same thing but I need to close by saying there is a real danger that these disciples would not engage in mission. There was a real possibility that they might get way laid by some other means and not engage the mission. If you stop and think about it, they were human beings just like you and me.

One of the first threats they had to going on mission was **their own families**. Most of them were probably married men. Imagine Peter, gone back to his home town in Capernaum and his wife saying, "Peter, you've been away for three years now. This Jesus thing has come and gone, and now it's time for you to pick up where you left off and help us raise the family here." Or maybe the wife of Matthew would say, "Matthew, you haven't collected taxes for about three years and the coffers are getting pretty thin here. We need you to get out there, set up your tax booth and begin bring in some income again." Or maybe John, who was young, was possibly engaged. His fiancé might say, "John, it's time for us to tie the knot, settle down and start a family." All of these were possibilities that threatened the disciples as Jesus ascended into Heaven with this mission in front of them.

Secondly, there was a threat from their **religious authorities**. The religious leaders wanted these disciples to assimilate back into Judaism. In the first chapters of Acts, the leaders tried over and over again to convince the disciples that Jesus had left. "Cool your jets. It's time for you to become good Jews like the rest of us." There was a possibility that they would succumb to the pressure to turn around and go back to a system that was full of so much that was not what God wanted people to be engaged in religiously. But they had

been with the resurrected Christ and they did not succumb to the pressure—but the possibility was there.

Thirdly, there was the **Roman government**. The last thing the Roman government wanted was these uneducated fishermen from Galilee running around the empire disrupting communities with a new message about a new King, a new Savior, a new Lord. They feared the men getting the allegiance of the people pulled away from their government and turned to something else.

There's tension coming from all of these areas: family, religion, political scene in the environment in which they lived. The disciples could have succumbed but to their credit, each one of them (except for one who died a martyr's death prematurely in Jerusalem) went outside their own country, proclaimed the gospel message and died in a foreign country. Each one of them died giving the gospel to other people because they believed there was no country too far, no people too distant and no culture too difficult for the gospel to penetrate.

How about you? I don't know where you are in your life at this time or how deeply engaged you feel God leading you in His Great Commission. But I would pray that you would not allow any one of those three threats to hinder you from God's calling in your life. It could be family—parents who are saying, “There's no way I want you to go out and give your life to missions. Why don't you get a real job and make real money in life.” It might be kids telling their parents who are thinking about going, “No, Dad and Mom. We need you here.” Many times the biggest stumbling block to missions is family members within the church itself.

Secondly, it might be what we call the religious pluralism today. “Why are you people, you Christians, saying there is only one way, one message, one God and one Scripture? We know in this pluralistic world there are so many other options? Just cool it. Don't embarrass us by not being PC. Just say that everyone's belief is valid as long as it's true to themselves.” That's the world in which we live yet we dare not let the cultural religious environment prevent us from taking the message of Jesus to the peoples of the earth.

Maybe the third one is this: you look around the world, watch CNN and other programs and say, “The world is so dangerous. No matter where you go, you see strife, fighting, rebellion and revolution. Who would ever want to leave the safe shores of the United States and go somewhere on mission with Christ?” You can't let circumstances,

political scenes or the world's environment scare you away from the calling Jesus might be giving to you.

I don't know where you are. I don't know if you say, "I can actually engage in missions more deeply by praying, giving or by actually committing myself." But I leave today asking you to fully consider what your part in the message of the church happens to be. We're on mission with God. We need to align ourselves with the will of God in order to perform the mission of God.

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