

Sonoraville Baptist Church
Sunday, April 11, 2010 – 11:00 AM
Rev. Steve Skates, Pastor

The Great Commission and Promise – Matthew 28:16-20

Introduction: This morning, we bring our study of the gospel of Matthew to a close with perhaps the most familiar of all the passages in Matthew. **READ Matthew 28:16-20 (NIV)**

This passage has been called the Great Commission. And it's aptly named because not only does it contain the last recorded words of Jesus in Matthew, in this directive, Jesus leaves us with our marching orders - we are to go, share, teach, make disciples, and to baptize in His name. This is our purpose and our mission as Christians. It is the Great Commission.

However, as important as this Great Commission is; we need to be careful and not miss another great truth of this passage. This truth is important because not only is it the key to sharing the gospel but it's the key to coping with life itself. I call it the Great Promise of Jesus who said, "*And surely I am with you always....*"

I want to talk to you today about this Great Commission and Great Promise Jesus left us with and how it can impact our daily lives. Let's consider some specific implications of Jesus' Great Commission and His Great Promise. First, let's discuss:

1. The Challenge of the Great Commission

Jesus' Great Commission is to "*go and make disciples.*" This is the process of conversion - sharing the Good News of Christ with the lost, leading them to Christ, and then birthing them into the Church so they, in turn, can go out and do the same.

Now, let me emphasize here that it's not our job to convert anyone. That's the Holy Spirit's job. Our job is to point them to Jesus and present the opportunity for them to be converted. It's sort of like sowing seeds. A farmer can spread the seeds but he can't make the seeds sprout and grow. But sowing seeds and producing a harvest requires patience, hard work, and sometimes, trial and error for the farmer. Well, so does going and making disciples for the Christian. It's not an easy thing to do.

For example, let's look at some methods of going and making disciples and the challenges they bring. First, there is:

Mass Evangelism – This is the modern name for Revivals and Crusades - This method was used by the Apostle Peter on the day of Pentecost when he rose to defend the power of the Holy Spirit who had transformed 120 weak, scared, and timid disciples into bold witnesses for Christ. Peter preached the crucified and risen Jesus to them and about 3,000 people got saved all at once. That is Mass Evangelism!

But in later years, Mass Evangelism has evolved into intentional Revivals and Evangelistic Rallies. These were made popular in early America by great men of God such as Charles Finney, D.L. Moody and Billy Sunday. In our generation the Crusade has been the main tool used by Billy Graham and his team of evangelists. Millions of people have come to know Jesus by this method, and it's proven to be highly effective.

However, staging mass evangelism rallies and revivals today can quite expensive and demanding. For example, did you know that for our own revival, our planning team has been working hard for four weeks in preparation for our revival?

With crusades, there are arenas or stadiums to be leased and scheduled. There are security issues, parking issues, electronic sound and media concerns, musical guests to contract, program personalities to secure, material to print, promotion and advertisement issues, counselors to train, and a host of other needs which all cost a tremendous amount of money, time and massive organizational and expertise to pull off effectively. Another way to go and make disciples is through:

Personal Evangelism – Personal evangelism is simply one-on-one witnessing. It's talking to a co-worker, a classmate, a family member, your hair dresser, a restaurant server, or the person at the check-out counter. It's going door-to-door in your neighborhood with a gospel tract or a church brochure, telling folks about Jesus.

Personal evangelism is also a proven effective way to reach people for Christ. However, the painful reality is that so few Christians actually do it. William Fay, who wrote "*Sharing Jesus Without Fear*" says that less than 10% of all Christians have ever personally witnessed to anyone about Christ. (Fay, William *Share Jesus Without Fear*, Lifeway Press, 1997, pg. 6). There are a number of reasons people give for not engaging in

personal evangelism, including “*It’s not comfortable for me.*” “*I don’t know how.*” “*I’m afraid of being rejected.*” And “*I don’t have time.*”

Another way to go and make disciples is by:

Lifestyle or Friendship Evangelism – This method is perhaps the most natural and effective means of going and making disciples because it originated in the early church. **Acts 2:42-47 (NIV)** says that in the days following Pentecost, those 3,000 plus Christians, “*devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer...*” It says “*All the believers were together and had everything in common...Everyday they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.*”

Those early Christians were doing lifestyle evangelism before it they knew what it was. By their devotion to the Lord, and spending time with Him every day, they were witnessing the transforming power God in their lifestyle, and they were winning their friends and influencing people for Christ. And if you think about it, there is no more effective way to “*go and make disciples.*” Living your and practicing your beliefs before your people will allow them see the difference Christ has made in your life, and it will help people feel free to approach you.

Those are just some of the ways we can try to fulfill the Great Commission. Jesus doesn’t tell us here how to do it. He just tells us to do it using His message of the Gospel.

The problem and the challenge we face today is that people are farther from making a decision for Christ than ever before. Today, anywhere from 60 – 70% of Americans are unchurched, so the gap between Christians and non-Christians is wider than ever. Today, people are becoming increasingly skeptical and even scared of the church. This is due, in large part, to the junk that Hollywood puts out about Christians. Almost every Christian and minister is portrayed as an intolerant, bigoted, hate-filled extremist. This has to cast a shadow of doubt over all Christianity, and is helping move us America further away from Christianity. This puts us in the unenviable position of having to bridge a wider gap than the Church did in times past.

But one thing hasn’t changed. The cross of Jesus can still bridge the gap. It may take a wider and longer cross, but the cross is still the answer. The Gospel of Jesus Christ is still the same message we must preach and live. And to do that in this day and age, we have to show people that we are different than those stereotypes. We have to be people of integrity and purpose. And our purpose is going and sharing and teaching and baptizing and making disciples. Finally, I want us to see:

2. The Comfort of the Great Promise

When Jesus said, “*I am with you always*” the literal translation means: “*I am with you all the days.*” Jesus wanted His disciples to know that every day, no matter if they were having a good day or a bad day, He would be with them. And oh how they needed that assurance. You see, they knew that Jesus was with them in the mountaintop experiences like the coming of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost when 3,000 people accepted Christ as their Savior and Lord. They knew Jesus was with them as they worshipped together in the Temple and broke bread together in their homes. They felt the Lord’s presence as they enjoyed “*the favor of all the people.*” And as “*the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.*” I’m sure those were the good days when they felt so close to the Lord that they must have wondered how heaven could be any better.

But they also needed to know that Jesus would be with them in those days when things were not so good. Peter and John needed to know the Lord would be with them as they were being thrown in jail for preaching the crucified and resurrected Jesus. Stephen needed to know the Lord would be with him as he was being stoned to death for preaching the gospel. The Apostles needed to know the Lord would be with them as the unity of the church was being threatened by the grumbling and complaining and prejudices arising in the congregation.

The church flourished in the good days because of Jesus’ Great Promise, but the Church also survived persecution and trials in the tough days because of that same Great Promise.

Following Jesus and His way is not easy. Sharing the gospel and making disciples is hard work. Maintaining a spirit of revival is not an easy thing to accomplish. So, along with the Great Commission, Jesus wanted to leave His followers with a Great Promise – “*I am with you all the days.*”

Now, we’ll probably not have to face being stoned to death, or killed with a sword, or put in prison because of our faith. However, we’re not immune from experiencing bad days as we strive to fulfill the Great

Commission: We'll have good days and, bad days. We'll have times when we wake up and say, "*Good morning Lord!*" and then we'll have those mornings when we wake up and mumble, "*Good Lord! It's morning!*"

Those "*Good morning Lord*" days are those precious times when we experience the goodness and mercy of God in a special way. Those days are when we've had prayers answered, and we have seen lives changed. Those days are when everything just seems to work out right and everything falls in place. And we need to always remember that Jesus promised to be with us in those days, making it possible for us to enjoy them.

So we also need to remember that when Jesus said He'd be with us always, He was also referring to those bad days when things don't always go according to our plan.

I mentioned the conflict in the church earlier and it serves as a good example. In Acts 6:1-7, we see that shortly after the explosive growth that took place following Pentecost, some problems stemming from selfishness and prejudice came up in the young church. The Greek-speaking Christians and the Jewish Christians began to bicker among themselves. The Greek-speaking members complained that their widows were being treated unfairly in the daily distribution of food, and that the Hebrew widows were getting preferential treatment. This had all the makings of a "*good old-fashioned church fight.*" But with godly wisdom, the Apostles were able to squelch the problem and come up with a solution that pleased everyone. They selected 7 men who were full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom who would see to this issue and handle it in a fair and equitable manner.

The reason that wiser heads prevailed was because Christ was still with them. He didn't approve of their selfish and divisive actions, but He didn't abandon them because He promised to be with His disciples in "*all the days*" – even the ones when they would not act very Christian-like. The result was that God's Spirit continued to work through the lives of those "*less than perfect*" church members in amazing and powerful ways as the rest of the book of Acts reveals.

My point is, there are some days when we act as if Christ is not with us. There are times when we mess-up, make mistakes, and act like anything but Christians. Sometimes we use poor judgment, make unwise decisions, and find ourselves headed in the wrong direction. But, even during those times, Jesus' Great Promise is still true. Jesus does not abandon us. He doesn't give up on us. He is still there for us even on those days when we act as if He is not there!

Conclusion: In the 1929 Rose Bowl, Georgia Tech played UCLA. One of the UCLA players was Roy Riegels. Just before halftime, Riegels recovered a fumble, but he got mixed up and lost his sense of direction. Instead of running toward UCLA's goal, he started running toward Georgia Tech's goal. He ran sixty-five yards the wrong way, but just as he got a few yards from the goal, one of his teammates managed to run him down and stop him before he scored a touchdown for the opposing team.

Backed up against their own goal line, UCLA couldn't move the ball and had to punt. Georgia Tech blocked the punt, and scored a safety. And those two points proved to be the margin of their victory that day over UCLA. From then on, Roy Riegels was known as "*Wrong Way Riegels.*"

But let me tell you the rest of the story. During halftime, in the UCLA locker room, Roy Riegels went over in a corner by himself, wrapped himself in a blanket, and just hung his head down. Just before the teams were to go back out to the field, the UCLA coach, looked at his team and said, "*Men, I want the same team that played the first half starting the second half.*" Well, all the players got up and headed back out to the field, all that is except Roy Riegels. The coach walked over to him and said, "*Roy, didn't you hear what I said? The same team that played the first half will start the second.*"

Roy Riegels looked up with tears in his eyes and said: "*Coach, I can't do it. I've ruined you. I've ruined the university's reputation. I've ruined myself. I can't face that crowd out there.*" Putting his hand on Roy's shoulder, the coach said, "*Roy, get up and go on back out there. The game is only half over.*"

Roy Riegels did get up and return to the field. What a second half he had! He played like a man possessed! The players for Georgia Tech said they had never had an opposing player play against them as hard as Roy Riegels played in that second half.

What was it that enabled "*Wrong Way Riegels*" to get back in the game? He had a coach who still believed in him even when he messed up and headed in the wrong direction. He had a coach who was still there for him even when he went the wrong way.

You may be here today and you feel just like Roy Riegals. You may feel like you've ran 65 yards in the wrong direction. Maybe you've used poor judgment. Maybe you've made some mistakes. Maybe there have been times when you've acted as if Christ was not in your life. But if you've heard nothing else today, hear this: Jesus' Great Promise is not based on your faithfulness. It's based on His faithfulness. And He's your ultimate coach who says time and time again: *"Listen, the game's not over. I'm not finished with you yet. I'm still here for you and here with you. You're still on my team, now, get up and get back in the game!"*

We as God's Church are not perfect, but we serve a perfect Savior. And Jesus, our Lord has given us a Great Commission to fulfill. There is no way we can fulfill it unless we believe in and trust in the Great Promise of *"I am with you all the days."* You don't have to give up and give in just because you've messed up. You don't have to go through the tough days alone. Jesus goes with you every day of your life – the good days and the bad.

So, whatever kind of day you're having, Jesus is with you. He is available to help you. He has promised to be there for you. All you have to do is do what Horatio R. Palmer expressed in an old hymn. He said, *"Ask the Savior to help you, Comfort, strengthen, and keep you; He is willing to aid you, He will carry you through."*