

Bible Study Notes

The Great Commission

5/12/20

Passages: (all NRSV)

- Matthew 28:16-20
(traditional story of the Great Commission)
- Mark 16:15-18
- Luke 24:46-48
- John 20: 21-23
- Acts 1:6-8

This week subject is the “Great Commission”, basically the command for us to go and make disciples.

This command is found in all 4 Gospels and the Book of Acts.

It is interesting that all four Gospel writers include this command in one form or another. It is more common that such an event would only be found in some of the Gospels. Another interesting observation is the lack of definition of just exactly what the disciples were supposed to go and do. As you read through the notes reflect on this lack of definition. The passage from John probably contains the most complex theology. My notes in this area are from my resources and are not intuitive from reading the text. As you study John, remember that John is all about the glory of God in Jesus Christ and typically involves a great deal of symbolism.

Common Elements

These are common elements found in all 5 stories.

- Go, the disciples would need to go someplace away
- All nations, not just Jew or Gentile, all nations/peoples.
- The disciples were to act as representatives of Jesus

Matthew 28:16-20

Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them. When they saw him, they worshiped him; but some doubted. And Jesus came and said to them, “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, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”

- This passage is generally referred to as the traditional “Great Commission”.

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- The task is to make disciples, baptizing and teaching.
- Note: Jesus and His Disciples did not have a ministry of baptizing, so this is something new.
- Also, Jesus had never asked His Disciples to teach before.
- Matthew invokes an image of the Trinity with the language of: Father, Son and Holy Spirit” although the Trinity was not a concept that Matthew specifically presented. This is an indication that Jesus was part of “God” in some fashion.

Mark 16:15-18

And he said to them, “Go into all the world and proclaim the good news to the whole creation. The one who believes and is baptized will be saved; but the one who does not believe will be condemned. And these signs will accompany those who believe: by using my name they will cast out demons; they will speak in new tongues; they will pick up snakes in their hands, and if they drink any deadly thing, it will not hurt them; they will lay their hands on the sick, and they will recover.”

- Point of curiosity: This is in the last section of Mark. Most scholars believe that this section was added on at some later date.
- The task is to “proclaim the good News” to all.
- Mark adds the concept of saved and condemned which is not in Matthew. See the notes under John.
- Mark also adds the concept of snakes and drinking deadly things which isn’t found elsewhere.

Luke 24:46-48

and he said to them, “Thus it is written, that the Messiah is to suffer and to rise from the dead on the third day, and that repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things.

- Luke’s version is very general.
- The task is proclaiming repentance and the forgiveness of sins
- The task is still to go to all nations, but Luke specifically mentions starting with Jerusalem.
- Luke’s version also does not directly tell the disciples to “go”. He makes a statement of what needs to be done – and that the disciples are the witnesses, implying that the disciples are charged with the task.

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John 20:21-23

Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you." 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 retain the sins of any, they are retained."

- John views events from a different perspective than the other Gospels. The events from the empty tomb to Pentecost all get pulled together. The passage that contains his version of the Great Commission also has the giving of the gift of the Holy Spirit (Pentecost).
- John also defines the task differently. John's version defines the task of the disciples to be the same task that God the Father sent Jesus to do.
- When the disciples receive this command, they simultaneously are given the gift of the Holy Spirit to enable them to do the work.
- The section of forgiving and retaining sins is the complicated part. We talked about John's thinking on this in an earlier study. Basically, John sees sin as not recognizing Jesus as God. The task of the disciples is to go and enable people to believe in Jesus. As they open their hearts and believe in Jesus their sins are forgiven. Actually, as they believe in Jesus their sins go away.
- If the disciples do not convince people of the glory of Jesus then their sins are retained by their own disbelief.
- A point for reflection:
 - Jesus was sent by the Father
 - the Disciples were sent
 - we are sent

This helps us understand our mission as Christians in the world. Not as weak substitutes for Jesus, but rather we are to be strengthened and enabled by the Holy Spirit to do as Jesus did.

- Point #2 for reflection:
 - by us loving each other we reveal God to the world...
 - in so doing, we enable the world to enter into relationship with God.

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Acts 1:6-8

So when they had come together, they asked him, "Lord, is this the time when you will restore the kingdom to Israel?" He replied, "It is not for you to know the times or periods that the Father has set by his own authority. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."

- Acts is believed to be written by Luke as a "Part 2" to his Gospel.
- This passage uses the same "witnesses" language of the Gospel of Luke. Yet it incorporates the giving of the Holy Spirit at the same time like John's Gospel.
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Closing Comment

In my message last Sunday I talked about "the importance". How important it was to Jesus that Thomas believed. When we read in all four Gospels, and the Book of , versions of the Great Commission, we can get a sense of the importance this concept had with the early Christians. It is not an "oh, by the way" or "If you feel like it". It is evident that Jesus felt this was critical to growing the Kingdom of God. The early Christians that were eye-witnesses to Jesus teaching this idea recorded this for our understanding.

Reaching a full understanding of "what it is" that we are called to do is essential for us to discern our mission in the Community of Kalamo!

- **Next week:**

The Ascension

- Luke 49-53
- Mark 16:19-20
- Acts 1:9-11