

## Sermon 2024, April 21

Before the resurrected Jesus departed from this world, returning to the Father, in glory, He charged His followers - the true church of God's redeemed - with its mission.

He spoke it first on a mountain in Galilee, to a group that included the eleven apostles, and likely many additional followers.

Perhaps, this was "the group of 500" that Paul mentions in 1 Corinthians chapter 15.

### **(Slide 1)**

As you see on the overhead, Matthew writes:

Jesus came near and said to them,

"All authority has been given to me in heaven and on earth.

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 everything I have commanded you.

And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age."

But it was not then that Jesus ascended to Heaven.

Some days later, at the Mount of Olives, just outside Jerusalem, the resurrected Jesus met again with some number of His followers, surely including the eleven apostles.

And again He charged them with their mission. As you see on the overhead, He said this:

...you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come on you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.”

A close comparison of these two charges, reveals differences that are complementary.

The big picture of what Jesus “wants of us” is the same, but each of these two charges has its own emphasis.

## **(SLIDE 2)**

In the one recorded by Matthew, emphasis is on AUTHORIZATION given to us by Jesus.

In the charge from Acts, emphasis is on POWER given to us by the Holy Spirit.

## **(SLIDE 3)**

In Matthew, emphasis is on making disciples.

In Acts, by calling us ‘witnesses’, emphasis is on evangelism.

## **(SLIDE 4)**

In Matthew, the target audience is conceptualized by people group and ethnicity. The word here translated as ‘nations’ is ethnos. It refers to the diverse people-groups and ethnicities of the world.

In Acts, the target audience is by location.

## **(SLIDE 5)**

In Matthew, the people who are won, are won unto the triune God - for they are to be baptized in the name of each PERSON of the triune God.

In Acts, the people who are won, are won to Jesus, specifically - for He calls us 'MY WITNESSES'. That is - we give testimony about JESUS.

## **(SLIDE 6)**

In Matthew, emphasis is on the DURATION of our mission - to the end of the AGE.

And in Acts, emphasis is on EXTENT - to the remotest part of the earth.

## **(SLIDE 7)**

So when we come to faith in Christ, we do well, as we grow in our faith, as we learn more and more of God's word, as we develop our prayer life, we do well to listen to the Holy Spirit and ask,

“How do I fit into this?

“What role can I play in the labor to which Jesus has charged us?”

Right now, the world's population is about 8 billion people.

And almost all of them are within seven relationships from you.

That is to say, you know someone, (counting the iterations on my fingers)

Who knows someone,

Who knows someone,

Who knows someone,

Who knows someone,

Who knows someone

Who knows BLANK.

Fill in that blank with anyone on the planet.

And it will be true of you.

Virtually everyone in the world, is within seven relationships of you.

The president of North Korea.

A soldier in Myanmar.

A Buddhist monk who lives in Shri Lanka.

A mother in the Central African Republic.

Regardless of language and ethnicity, virtually everyone on the planet is within seven relationships from you.

The math behind this is actually... complicated.

The mathematicians credited with working this out are named Watts and Strogatz.

Their work was published in NATURE magazine in in 1998.

Of course you and I have a hard time visualizing seven relationships out from ourselves.

But God sees it clearly.

So when the Spirit of God leads you and deploys you HERE.

Or THERE.

One of us serving in THIS way, and another, serving in THAT way.

When we allow ourselves to be deployed by The Holy Spirit as HE sees fit, the Holy Spirit within us, makes EACH of us a “first domino”.

That is, a force that effects consequences. With ripple effects spanning out across the ‘pond’ of our relationships.

This status as ‘a force that effects consequences’ is not something YOU do, per se - nor I.

We do not need to make ourselves into dynamic individuals.

The ripple effects that come from your life and from mine - this is what the Holy Spirit does.

You and I need only to be faithful.

It is the Holy Spirit within who initiates and directs the series of cause and effect relationships that emanate out from the obedient believer.

Though we who love Christ are relatively few in number, we may be confident the Holy Spirit deploys each of us with wisdom and purpose to create a cacophony of ripple effects - all originating in the Holy Spirit through your life of faith and service - and mine.

I think this is what Jesus had in mind when he said (in Matthew 5:13), 'you are the salt of the earth' and (and in verse 14) 'you are the light of the world'.

This is what the Holy Spirit accomplishes in each of us as we live the lives of faithful believers.

## **(SLIDE 8)**

Paul spoke of such a series of "cause and effect relationships" in 1 Thessalonians chapter 1, verses 6 through 8:

...you welcomed the message with joy from the Holy Spirit.

As a result, you became an example to all the believers in Macedonia and Achaia.

For the word of the Lord "rang out" from you, not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but in every place that your faith in God has gone out...

And so the Holy Spirit uses faithful individuals, and faithful churches to extend the offer of God, more and more, into the world.

## **(SLIDE 9)**

A while ago I was driving in my car with the radio on and I happened to be listening to a secular talk show.

There were at least three persons in this conversation and they found themselves talking about those Evangelical Christians.

And one of them mentioned that saying 'God hates the sin, but loves the sinner'.

They all knew it well, and they agreed they did not like it. They had each heard it and dismissed it, long ago.

But as I listened, I felt a bit satisfied.

The concise statement - that God loves the sinner and hates the sin - is indeed central to the Christian message.

And all of these persons on this talk show, who agreed they did not LIKE this message - were not only familiar with it, they were able to repeat it accurately.

And not merely in private conversation, but broadcasting on the radio.

This gave me a sense of accomplishment - the church is doing its job. The message is out there.

But I have another anecdote which says our work must continue.

Our former elder, Jay, who is now back home in Tennessee, has volunteered from time to time to work with Erv and the Gideons, distributing bibles to various institutions, including schools, universities and hotels in the Las Vegas area.

Once when I asked Jay about how the distribution at a certain school went, he related to me about a kid to whom Jay had said, 'would you like a Bible?'

The kid said, 'what's a Bible?'

He didn't know.

So the need for outreach is not ONLY distant places of the globe, it is also local, and generational.

This is why we do well to pray for - and support - the labors of Dan and Eva and all who volunteer in our youth and children's ministries.

I remember Frances once speaking to me about some kids in her Sunday School class.

With a sense of amazement, she said, "THEY KNOW NOTHING".

That is, nothing about Jesus and the Bible.

We also do well to pray for other local labors, such as Don Moberger's work with incarcerated adults, and Kathleen Hill's labors for incarcerated youth.



As well as the many other ways persons among us are busy serving in various capacities.

As you know OUTREACH, is a part of our church's "purpose statement", which Don Scott has beautifully set to music.

That statement helps us maintain a line of sight to our collective mission as a church.

And setting it to music only makes it more effective.

Now with these things said, and with Jesus' dual charge to the church before us (what has become known as 'the Great Commission'), there are two true things of crucial importance - that the Great Commission stands on.

If we, as followers of Jesus, do not have clarity about the two great truths (upon which the Great Commission Stands) - we will quickly lose our sense of personal identification with it.

## **(SLIDE 10)**

Those two great truths are these.

The whole world is lost.  
Only Jesus saves.

The whole world is lost.  
Only Jesus saves.

## **(SLIDE 11)**

Both of these truths are affirmed in 1 John 5:12.

It says:

The one who has the Son has life. The one who does not have “the Son of God” does not have life.

Think about a remote tribal group in the Amazon, or in central Asia, who never heard the Gospel.

Do they have “the Son of God”?

Or the kid in Las Vegas who doesn’t know what a Bible is.

Does he have the Son of God?

No.

How can they, if they’ve never heard the Gospel?

So if they do not have the Son of God, do they have life?

They do not.

**(SLIDE # 12)**

This is why Paul wrote the following, in Romans 10:13 and 14.

This statement by Paul is premised on the truth that those who have not heard the gospel are indeed lost.

...everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.

How, then, can they call on him they have not believed in?

And how can they believe without hearing about him?

And how can they hear without a preacher?

Paul is plainly saying that those who have never heard the Gospel are unsaved. Which is why it is important that God's redeemed take the message everywhere.

As many of you know, Jerry and Lois Wood labored for many years in Brazil, including labors in remote areas of the Amazon, bringing the Gospel to persons who had never previously HEARD the gospel.

I once asked Jerry (who is now with the Lord) what he thought about the tribal people he was reaching out to - did he think they were really lost and without hope - except for the Gospel that he and Lois were bringing to them?

And Jerry's answer was definite; YES. Absolutely.

He and Lois firmly understood the Bible's teaching that the people of the world - including those who have never heard the Gospel - are indeed lost.

In Paul's great theological TREATISE, the Book of Romans, Paul first establishes "that the spiritual condition" native to all humanity is that people everywhere are lost.

Paul treated this as foundational, so the Gospel of Jesus will be understood as humanity's only solution.

**(SLIDE #13)**

In Romans chapter 1, verses 18 through 20, Paul says this:

(18) ...God's wrath is revealed from heaven against all godlessness and unrighteousness of people who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth,

When Paul says 'God's wrath is revealed', he is saying the native condition into which all humanity is born, is that we are estranged from God and under condemnation.

The native condition for all humanity is that we are "Godless and unrighteous".

Demonstrating this, collective humanity reflexively 'suppresses the truth'.

Continuing in verse 19, Paul says,

(19) since what can be known about God is evident among them, because God has shown it to them.

Paul says, 'God has shown it to them'. This means God has labored supernaturally to cause people to know basic truth about Himself.

This is partly through the evidence of creation, and the glories and workings of nature. But it isn't ONLY that. God works in the minds of humanity to cause humans to know that what they see with their eyes IS the work of God.

And God works in the minds of people to cause them to recognize, what creation is telling them:

God exists,  
He is Creator,  
He has eternal power, and  
He has a divine nature.

And He expects people to respond to these truths by giving Him honor and by giving thanks to Him.

Paul says...

(20) For his (that is, God's) invisible attributes, that is, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen since the creation of the world, being understood through what (God) has made.

God has labored supernaturally to impress upon the minds of fallen humanity certain truths about Himself, so that people may respond.

If they DON'T respond by TURNING TO GOD, Paul says at the end of verse 20,

...people are without excuse.

And at verse 21, Paul affirms that all humanity has indeed failed to respond.

(21) For though they knew God, they did not glorify him as God or show gratitude.

When Paul says that fallen humanity 'KNEW God', he means that God caused people to know these basic truths about Himself, and people are required to respond by turning TO God.

But because humanity as a whole unrighteously SUPPRESSED the truth, Paul says,

...their thinking became worthless, and their senseless hearts were darkened.

And so this is the status that is native to humanity. All humanity is lost, in spiritual darkness, and under God's condemnation.

This is the foundation upon which Paul establishes the Gospel. Before you can embrace God's solution, you must recognize the NEED.

(SLIDE 14)

And this corresponds to the Gospel of John, chapter 3, verse 17.

...God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.

The world is already condemned.

God doesn't need to send His Son to humanity in order to bring condemnation.

God sent His Son in order to save the willing.

(SLIDE 15)

So we have these two true TRUTHS that are of great importance, and upon which the Great Commission stands.

The whole world is lost  
Only Jesus saves

If you do not have it clear in your own mind that these things are indeed true, your sense of personal identification with the “Great Commission” will rapidly diminish.

Many years ago, I had a friend who was definitely born-again and a regular church-goer.

But he had his own way of thinking about things.

One night as we sat at his favorite pizzeria, I found him telling me that he believes God saves all devout people - whatever their religion may be.

As long as they mean well (he said) and they are true to the God of their understanding, they will go to heaven.

So this friend of mine did not believe EITHER of our two foundational truths.

He did not believe that the whole world is lost.

And he did not believe that personal faith in Jesus is the only way to be saved.

Needless to say, this friend never amounted to much when it came to Christian outreach, or volunteering, or praying for outreach events, or sharing his faith, or supporting the work of world missions.

Because he did not believe these two foundational truths, he did not IDENTIFY (in any tangible way) with the work of the Great Commission.

So we have seen that Romans chapter one teaches all humanity is lost.

And we have seen Romans 10:13 and 14 is premised on this truth.

And we have seen that 1 John 5:12 affirms both of these foundational truths.

He who has the Son has life. He who does not have the Son of God does NOT have life.

## (SLIDE 16)

These two foundational truths are also implicit in a declaration spoken by Paul in Acts 13:47:

...this is what the Lord has commanded us: I have made you a light for the Gentiles to bring salvation to the end of the earth.”

If the world out there is NOT lost - and if there is some other way to be saved - then it would not be necessary to **bring salvation to the end of the earth**.

## (SLIDE 17)

So far, I've placed an incrementally greater emphasis on the FIRST of these two truths.



So I'll conclude with scripture that emphasizes Jesus as the ONLY WAY of salvation.

## **(SLIDE 18)**

Jesus said,

“I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.

(John 14:6)

This claim of exclusivity means that “a relative FEW” will be redeemed unto eternal fellowship with God.

## **(SLIDE 19)**

This is confirmed by Jesus in Matthew chapter 7, verse 13 and 14:

“Enter through the narrow gate. For the gate is wide and the road broad that leads to destruction, and there are many who go through it.

How narrow is the gate and difficult the road that leads to life, and few find it.

Jesus IS the narrow gate.

Humanity is filled with false teachings, philosophies and ideas that cannot save.

This creates “a cacophony of confusion”, and all the more inhibits people from finding that narrow gate and passing through it.

## (SLIDE 20)

But Jesus is indeed the only way of salvation, as Peter proclaimed in Acts 4:12,

There is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to people by which we must be saved.”

## (SLIDE 21)

Coming back to the twofold charge of Jesus to the church. The Great Commission.

It has implications locally and globally, and everywhere in between.

But we will only have a strong sense of personal identification with it, if we have a clear understanding about its two foundational truths.

The whole world is really lost.

Only Jesus saves.

(Prayer)

Lord Jesus, please always renew us in our sense of identification with the Great Commission. May we listen to your Spirit, and each of us have a place in the labors, by which many may be saved, and you glorified in our lives.

Amen.