

“The Plan for Global Mission”

Matthew 28:18-20; Acts 1:1-11

I want to preach my final message in this series that we have ‘Convictions of a Disciple-Making Church.’ Though this is the final message, it doesn’t mean that we are done with the principles we have come away with. I fully intend on viewing everything we do as a church from here on out through the lens of these convictions. We must give ourselves to the same task that the church in the New Testament gave itself to, such as:

- Corporate Prayer
- Biblical Teaching
- Personal Evangelism
- Relational Discipleship
- Gospel-Driven Ministry

A final conviction that I want you to see involves the plan for global mission. The first century church was committed to the task of making disciples among the nations. They took the Great Commission seriously. During the nearly three decades that span the book the Acts, the church went from being a tiny group of people in the city of Jerusalem to being a movement that had literally spread throughout the entire Roman Empire. They made the last words of Jesus their first priority.

We too have a mission. It is the same mission that the church lived for in Acts. God has not saved us and taken us straight to heaven. Instead, He has left us in a world of massive need for a short time. Our time here is like a mist, or a vapor. Each one of our lives individually and collectively form a local church like this for

just a short amount of time. We want to make that time count for the spread of the gospel in a world of urgent spiritual need.

We do not exist as a church to simply coast through life in a casual and nonchalant way. We are created for so much more than that. We exist as a church for a very specific reason. God has seen to it that our local church exist for the accomplishment of a global mission. I want to show you what that means this morning from God's Word. I'll start in Matthew 28 and then look at Acts 1 as well. I want us to answer the question: "What does it mean to say that we exist as a local church for the accomplishment of a global mission?" We believe in global mission because God loves the nations and Christ commands us to go and make disciples of all nations.

Before His ascension, the Bible says that Jesus laid out the agenda that He had in mind for His church. The agenda involves world mission and evangelization.

After all He had accomplished through His earthly ministry, His sacrificial death, and victorious resurrection, Jesus then commissioned His disciples. That simply means that He gave them something to do. He gave them the task of proclaiming the good news of salvation to the ends of the earth, baptizing those who believe, and teaching them to obey everything that He commanded.

Matthew 28:18-20—“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, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.’”

Our salvation is not the be-all and end-all of what God wants to do with us! It is not the end of the process, but the beginning. We're saved and set apart for mission.

Tony Evans' definition of a 'kingdom disciple' is about the best I've come across. He says, "A kingdom disciple is a believer who takes part in the spiritual development process of progressively learning to live all of life under the lordship of Jesus Christ."

The lordship of Jesus Christ demands that you actively embrace your role in the mission of God.

God has called out of the world a body of people known as the church, made up of men and women and boys and girls who live under the lordship of Jesus Christ. He wants us to become disciples who make other disciples, who can then be sent into the world to infiltrate every part of it until every nation, tribe, and tongue has been reached.

Did you know that you are supposed to be a disciple at your work, on the job, bringing the good news of Jesus Christ into that environment? That's why the church must encourage and equip Christians to be involved in the arts and entertainment, in politics and law, in economics and educations—in order that Christ be introduced to a world that doesn't know Him.

We must recapture a sense of calling!

All of this applies to my everyday life. You and I have a mission to fulfill. It starts in my backyard, but it doesn't stop there. It includes a global mandate.

That's why Acts is so important. Without the book of Acts, you and I would really have no way of understanding what the Great Commission given in Matthew 28 looks like.

The book of Acts is largely the message of the birth and expansion of the early church throughout the first century world. It is called 'Acts' because it records the supernatural activity of God's Spirit through the apostles. He is an active God working through an active church. That's why Acts is such an exciting book, and

it seems to end abruptly after 28 action packed chapters. The reason for this is that the story of the church continues well into the present day.

The story of the church in Acts is still an ongoing story. As long as the church is in the world, we have a mission to carry out. Remember what Jesus said:

Matthew 16:18—“I will build My church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.”

The book of Acts was written by Luke, who was a travel companion of the apostle Paul. He was a doctor and historian, and he writes both his gospel and Acts with great precision. His keen sense of detail is observable throughout his writings, and what he writes is nothing less than inerrant Scripture inspired by the Spirit of God.

The history covered throughout the book of Acts spans three decades, a short period of time. Yet within these first 30 years of the church, the gospel moves from an isolated part of the world all the way to Rome itself.

Michael Green—*“Three crucial decades in world history. That is all it took. In the years between AD 33 and 64 a new movement was born. In those thirty years it got sufficient growth and credibility to become the largest religion the world has ever seen and to change the lives of hundreds of millions of people. It has spread into every corner of the globe and has more than two billion adherents. It has had an indelible impact on civilization, on culture, on education, on medicine, on freedom, and of course on the lives of countless people worldwide. And the seedbed for all this, the time when it took decisive root, was in these three decades. It all began with a dozen men and a handful of women... and then the Spirit came.”*

Notice several things from these verses:

1. The PROOF of His resurrection is given

1—In the first book, O Theophilus, I have dealt with all that Jesus began to do and teach,

Such an introduction reveals the writer of Acts to be Luke, who began his gospel in the same way:

Luke 1:1-4—“Inasmuch as many have undertaken to compile a narrative of the things that have been accomplished among us, just as those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and ministers of the word have delivered them to us, it seemed good to me also, having followed all things closely for some time past, to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, that you may have certainty concerning the things you have been taught.”

The proper name ‘Theophilus’ may very well have been some Roman official in government somewhere. Also likely, it is a Greek term that means ‘Lover of God’ and is a poetic way of addressing the reader.

2—until the day when he was taken up, after he had given commands through the Holy Spirit to the apostles whom he had chosen.

3—He presented himself alive to them after his suffering by many proofs, appearing to them during forty days and speaking about the kingdom of God.

Luke says that in his gospel account, he has already dealt with all that Jesus began to do and teach, concluding with His ascension and commissioning of His disciples. Now, the book of Acts is going to pick up where he had left off.

Acts begins with a re-emphasis of the resurrection. This only makes sense, because it is the truth of Christ’s resurrection from the dead that gives impetus to our mission as His disciples. It is what makes the good news so good.

The Great Commission would not make sense without the truth of the resurrection. Without a risen Savior, we would really have no good news to proclaim to the world. It would make Christianity no different than any other world religion.

“Proofs” - *convincing evidence; something plainly known*

Luke is pointing out how Christianity is based upon fact. It is a very important sentence, for it indicates that Jesus did not merely give His disciples certain ideas that they were then to carry into the world. He appeared to them as one who had risen from the dead.

Luke is saying that the eyewitness account of what he is writing is based on solid, factual evidence. The gospel did not go forth on mere conjecture. There is verifiable proof that Jesus Christ rose from the dead.

The gospel we preach is founded upon objective truth. As Christians, you and I are not sent into the world with untested theory. Rather, we have been entrusted with the truth. The God who made heaven and earth has acted in real time and space. The truth is that Jesus Christ is God in human flesh. He lived among us, died for sinners, and is risen and ascended! Luke says that the proof is evident to see.

2. The PRIORITY of His kingdom is established

During the period of forty days that the resurrected Jesus was with His disciples, verse 3 says that He spent time speaking with them about the ‘kingdom’ of God.

The kingdom of God is His sovereign rule.

4—And while staying with them he ordered them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the promise of the Father, which, he said, ‘you heard from me;

5—for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now.'

In his gospel account, Luke had written extensively about the ministry of John the Baptist and of how John had told the crowds who came out to him:

Luke 3:16—“I baptize you with water, but he who is mightier than I is coming, the strap of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.”

The Savior to come would baptize people with the Holy Spirit and fire. Those who trust in Him for salvation, who repent, who believe the gospel, they will be baptized with the Spirit. That means that they will be immersed into the Spirit of God at the moment of salvation. (see Pentecost in Acts 2)

Those who are not baptized with the Spirit will be baptized with fire, which is speaks of judgment.

Confusion exists among some about what it means to be baptized with the Holy Spirit. Some confuse it with being filled with the Spirit, which is something that is altogether different. Every believer is baptized with the Spirit the moment that they come to faith in Christ. It simply means that Christ has opened up the way of access for you into the presence of God. The Spirit of God takes up residence in your life when you become a Christian. The filling of the Spirit refers to a the surrendered life that is led by God. It is me under the influence of the Spirit.

6—So when they had come together, they asked him, ‘Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?’

In other words, is it now time for eschatological fulfillment of the kingdom? They were still confused in their thinking about the kingdom of Messiah. They were looking for a political kingdom. It was their idea of Heaven on earth!

Notice what Jesus says:

7—He said to them, ‘It is not for you to know the times or seasons that the Father has fixed by his own authority.’

Rather than giving them an answer to the questions they have about the end times, Jesus redirects their focus. They must not become preoccupied with God’s kingdom as a realm, but realize the priority of God’s kingdom as a rule.

The aspect of the kingdom that they must prioritize is the rule of Christ in human hearts. We desire to see Jesus Christ enthroned in every human heart. Think of it—what problem do we currently have that ultimately cannot be solved by the Lordship of Jesus Christ in every heart?

That is what mission concerns itself with. Missions longs to see Christ enthroned in human hearts because He alone is deserving of the world’s worship.

John Piper—*“Missions is not the ultimate goal of the church. Worship is. Missions exists because worship doesn’t. Worship is ultimate, not missions, because God is ultimate, not man. Worship, therefore, is the fuel and goal in missions. It’s the goal of missions because in missions we simply aim to bring the nations into the white-hot enjoyment of God’s glory. The goal of missions is the gladness of the peoples in the greatness of God.”*

A genuine passion for God’s glory inevitably leads to a firm commitment to reach the lost. To be His disciple means that I am concerned first and foremost with His glory, which means that I will live with missionary zeal.

It wasn’t too long ago that big time cuts were announced within the International Mission Board of the SBC. For the first time, we had to bring missionaries home because of a lack of resources to keep them on the field. Nearly 1,000 missionaries had to come off the field, bringing our totals down to the same level as 1993.

Why? The basic issue is lack of discipleship here at home.

The vital connection between missions and discipleship was explained well by two missionary doctors in an open letter that they wrote:

Tom and Cynthia Hale—*“Our major concern relates to the level of discipleship we have observed during our travels. We fear it is too shallow...During the past generation, the worldwide evangelical church has experienced unprecedented growth; in terms of the plain numbers coming to Christ, nothing like it has been seen before. But in the midst of this good news, there are troubling signs that many of these new believers are continuing to follow Christ primarily for what they can receive, rather than what they can give...We have a lingering sense that some rapidly growing churches are placing more emphasis on drawing people in than on sending people out. They have been placing more emphasis on the blessings of following Christ than on the cost. The ‘hard’ teachings are downplayed; it’s as if there is a fear of scaring people away. The main work of the church is to prepare those who are being drawn in to then be thrust out into the world as witnesses...The question is often asked, ‘How can we recruit more long-term missionaries?’ The answer, we believe, is for churches to place greater emphasis on discipling their members, on challenging their members to deny self, to forsake all, and to follow Christ with no conditions or limitations—in other words, to ‘sell out’ to Christ.”*

If this is our passion, then we need to realize that:

3. The POWER of His Spirit is supplied

Notice how Jesus redirects the focus of His disciples to the mission of being His witnesses in the world. He says that we must be His witnesses both here and to the ends of the earth.

8—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.

Such a mission would require supernatural power. Christ has a goal in mind for His followers in that He desires to empower them for the task of making disciples. This is not something that we have been left to do in our own strength.

“Power” - *word is dunamis and speaks of explosive power*

This Greek word entered our English language way back in the 1800's when a Swedish chemist by the name of Alfred Nobel made a discovery that became his fortune. Nobel discovered a power that was stronger than anything the world had known up until that time. He asked a friend of his who was a Greek scholar what the word for 'explosive power' was in Greek. To which his friend gave him this word—'dunamis.' Nobel decided to call his discovery by that name, so he called his explosive power 'dynamite.'

Used in this context in Acts 1:8, the word refers to the explosive, life-changing dynamic of the Holy Spirit operating through the simple proclamation of the gospel.

Think of it—Jesus Christ has supplied us already with the power we need for global mission.

4. The PLAN of His mission is laid out

Jesus has given us both power and a plan. Rather than retreating from the darkness of the world, Jesus intends for His disciples to penetrate it with the light of the gospel.

He says in verse 8, “You will be My witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.”

Verse 8 is essentially the key verse for the entire book of Acts. In the Greek text, 'Samaria' does not have a definite article before it. The article comes before 'Judea' which suggests that Judea and Samaria are to be understood together.

This makes for a three-fold outline for the book:

Chapters 1-7 deal with the preaching of the gospel in the city of Jerusalem.

Chapters 8-12 show how the gospel expanded beyond Jerusalem into Judea and Samaria.

Chapters 13-28 record the expansion of the gospel throughout the world and all the way to Rome.

Acts 1:8 is a succinct way for us to remember the scope of our mission as a local church. Our next door neighbors must be our concern, but we dare not stop there. As John Wesley said, "The world is my parish!" Our vision must be one of global mission.

What does this look like?

- Jerusalem—our immediate neighbors
- Judea—our circle of influence
- Samaria—our hard to reach communities
- End of the earth—our world

A helpful acronym to remember is 'FRANS.'

The plan of Jesus is for spiritually empowered disciples to take the light of the gospel to our lost neighbors, to our surrounding neighborhoods, and ultimately to the nations.

Jesus says, “You will be My witnesses.” This is both a prophetic promise as well as a direct command. But it is only true through the enabling power of God’s Spirit.

God’s Spirit empowers you and me to be witnesses for Christ. You and I are never alone in the mission.

“Witnesses” - *word that means martyr; those who have seen and testify to truth; those who have proven their faith in Christ by undergoing a violent death*

The Spirit empowers me to lay down my life for the sake of Christ. This is much more than the comfortable Christianity with which you and I have grown accustomed. May God save us from a comfortable, cozy Christianity that doesn’t really cost us anything!

The mission of God is not advanced on spare time and pocket change. Honestly, it is amazing what people give their time, energy, and resources to. Our heart is where our treasure is.

Why is it that this is the hardest thing for us to not lose track of in the local church? It is the one thing that Jesus has commanded us to do as a church, and yet it is the one thing that we often lose sight of.

5. The PROMISE of His return is motivating

One final consideration to make from the text is centered around the return of Jesus. When the 40 days of Him being with them came to a close, He ascends to be with the Father. The disciples are standing there watching Him go. Look in the text at what happens:

9—And when he had said these things, as they were looking on, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight.

Can you imagine what this must have been like? Before their very eyes, Jesus is taking from one dimension into the next. The 'cloud' that Luke describes is very much like the glory cloud of God described all throughout Scripture.

It was the same cloud that Moses had encountered on Sinai when God hid him in the cleft of the rock. It was the same cloud that went before the Israelites as God brought them up from Egypt. It was the same cloud that filled the tabernacle and temple, the same cloud that Ezekiel saw depart over the eastern gate of the city, and the same cloud described on the Mountain of Transfiguration.

10—And while they were gazing into heaven as he went, behold, two men stood by them in white robes,

11—and said, “Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into heaven? This Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven.”

Why are you standing around doing nothing? You heard what He said! You've seen who He is! Be motivated by the truth that this same Jesus is coming again. We are to get moving. There needs to be a sense of urgency in our lives as we seek to be faithful to Christ's mission.

Application

If we are to be a Great Commission church, then you must be a Great Commission Christian. Global mission means that we are surrendered to give, pray, and go. Our passion is always reflected in our priorities.

I'm sure you are familiar with the name of William Carey, born in 1761, a man who became father of the modern missions movement. June 13, 1793, was one of those pivotal moments in history where he, along with his wife Dorothy and their four children (one still an infant), set sail from England on a ship headed for India. At the time, only a handful of people even took notice of their departure,

but it would change the face of Christianity in the world and result in a chain of events that would see missionaries sent out all over the world.

Carey had been a shoemaker by trade, and with only a grammar school education, he had no credentials for missionary service except a burning conviction that God had called him devote his life to the 'conversion of the heathen.' His zeal was frowned upon by leading clergymen of his day, including John Ryland, who told him, "Young man, when God pleases to convert the heathen, He will do it without your aid or mine."

Despite facing opposition and criticism, William Carey remained confident of God's call on his life. A few months before he set sail for India, he preached a sermon for the Northamptonshire Baptist Association that was meeting in Nottingham, England. His most famous quote was taken from that sermon:

William Carey—*"Expect great things from God, attempt great things for God."*

His book, "An Enquiry into the Obligations of Christians to Use Means for the Conversion of the Heathen" was his most famous work that started the missionary movement. In the closing of his book, listen to what he wrote:

William Carey—*"What a heaven will it be to see the many myriads of poor heathens... who by their labors have been brought to the knowledge of God. Surely a crown of*

rejoicing like this is worth aspiring to. Surely it is worth while to lay ourselves out with all our might in promoting the cause and kingdom of Christ."

Within a few decades, there was a young girl living in rural Virginia whose mother would read her stories about the Careys and Judsons. When she was 18, she committed her life to Jesus Christ and determined to be a missionary. Her name was Charlotte Diggs Moon, but everyone knew her as 'Lottie.' She served nearly 40 years deep in the interior of China.

She died on Christmas Eve in 1912. At the time of her death, she was frail, weak, nearly starved, having just passed her 72nd birthday. She weighed no more than 50 pounds. All of her personal belongings could be placed in one small trunk. The executor of her estate sold all of her personal property and cleared her bank account of around \$250. She didn't even have enough to see to it that her remains make it back to Virginia. She literally had given all she had to Jesus Christ.

One year after her death, it was suggested that the annual Women's Missionary Union foreign missions offering be named after her. It was Lottie's suggestions that had launched the offering to begin with. In 1888, at her request, Southern Baptists raised \$3,315 to send three new female missionaries to China. She never would have imagined that since that time, the Lottie Moon Christmas Offering has raised nearly \$3 billion for international missions in her name.

Following her death, some fellow missionaries came in possession of her worn out Bible. On the flyleaf words were found which she had penned that to this day remain an encouragement to those who go for Christ to the nations:

"O, that I could consecrate myself, soul and body, to His service forever; O, that I could give myself up to Him, so as never more to attempt to be my own or to have any will or affection improper for those conformed to Him."

How should I apply the truth of this passage to my life now as a Christian man or woman?

First, the Holy Spirit is God's presence in you. This means that you are not alone, you are not without help, and you are not without strength. The Holy Spirit has come to enable and empower you as a believer.

Second, the Great Commission is God's plan for you. No matter how long you have been a Christian, God's plan for your life involves making disciples. He

wants to use you as a witness to your neighbors and to the nations. And this is true no matter your age or ability.

Third, Christ's return is God's promise to you. This is the blessed hope of the church, the impetus for evangelism and discipleship. It means that there must be a sense of urgency and expectancy behind all that we do for Christ.

Think about how this ought to provide us with a sense of responsibility and accountability. One day, Jesus Christ will return. And on that day, He will ask us, "How well did you do with what I entrusted you with?"

The Great Commission is something that every generation of Christians must obey. If we are truly committed to being a disciple-making church, how well will we obey these final instructions?