

The Great Commission Matthew 28:16-20

Today's passage must be one of the best known passages, certainly in Christian circles. It is short and to the point, and yet it is packed with a lot of meaning.

Crucial to this is Christ's command to us to make disciples of all nations and to do that by baptising them and teaching them. I do not want to take away anything from the importance of this instruction, but today I want to focus on some other aspects of Jesus' words.

In v18 Jesus starts his commission by saying "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me." This is a reference to Daniel 7:13-14 and Psalm 110, which are passages he has quoted elsewhere. In particular when he was asked by Caiaphas the High Priest are you the Messiah? The passage in Daniel was seen as a reference to what would happen at the end of time when "the son of man" would be given full authority.

We remember that Satan had already offered Jesus control of the world without any need for self sacrifice, but he had refused this offer. He was mocked as a king as he was nailed to the cross.

But Jesus defeated death and tyranny when he was crucified, and we see the proof of this in his resurrection. So now he is in authority. He is ruling the world, the universe and heaven.

Consider his commission again, full of statements of totality - '**All** authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. ¹⁹ Therefore go and make disciples of **all** nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰ and teaching them to obey **everything (all)** I have commanded you. And surely I am with you **always**, to the very end of the age.' He is already ruling!!

In the middle of this pandemic it can be difficult to believe. Though we note that throughout history epidemics have been common and they didn't stop the Kingdom growing. But, the Bible is not claiming that Christ has won a complete victory as yet. Clearly there is still much more to do. But Jesus has made the crucial first step and he is working steadily to bring heaven and earth together. The Kingdom is not growing through force of arms or commercial might. It grows through sacrificial love

And the most remarkable thing – though we are sort of used to it now – is that we are how the Kingdom will grow – v19 As he taught us to pray "Thy Kingdom come; on earth as it is in heaven." If we take seriously the command to follow Jesus we will do this primarily through

- The example we set – Jesus demonstrated things as much as he taught, consider the foot washing etc.
- The love we give – reaching out to the lost, the least, the marginalised
- Fighting for justice for the oppressed

One final point that Matthew is trying to capture here. He started his Gospel proclaiming Jesus is Emmanuel – God with us Matthew 1:23 and in Matthew 2:1-18. He is essentially saying Jesus is the true king of the Jews. Now as he finishes the Gospel, he is saying Jesus is King of the Jews, of the Gentiles and he will be with us Always! Truly someone to worship!

Finally, as we draw to a close I want to make one final point. In v10, Jesus instructs the women to tell the Apostles to return to Galilee. In John we find them back in Galilee waiting and in Luke they are told to wait for the Holy Spirit to come upon them. There was a period of waiting before their ministry started.

So now we too should wait, watch and pray. Consider what is going on : -

1. The UK Blessing song, it's now been watched 2.8 million times and rising, which is equivalent to 200 new people every single minute of every hour since last Sunday.
2. A **Tearfund** survey indicates that some 3 million new people have turned to prayer in the UK since lockdown began.
3. The online British bookstore Eden reports a 55% increase in sales of bibles in April. And demand for resources from **24-7 Prayer has "been going through the roof"**
4. Virtual Church Attendance - 24% of the British population. Almost one in four compared to the 5-7% we might have expected.

I don't believe God sent Covid-19, but I don't think it took Him by surprise, and he is working through it. So let's join in with the wait and pray for the Holy Spirit's leading.

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