

Sermons on Matthew The Great Commission

Part Four
All the Nations
Matthew 28:18-20

With Study Questions

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The Great Commission

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And Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, __“All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth.⁻¹⁹⁻ __Go __therefore and __make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,⁻²⁰⁻ __teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am __with you always, *even* to the end of the age.” __Amen (Matthew 28:18-20).

Introduction

Melting Pot

It is a funny place in American history. We clearly began as a white, Anglo-Saxon Protestant experiment with Puritans and Pilgrims. In time there came a heavy Roman Catholic population and influence. During the turn of the last century America was internationally observed as a place of hopes and dreams. Millions of (mostly) Europeans braved the dangers of a cross-Atlantic expedition to Ellis Island in order to enjoy the advantages of the New World. It was during this time that the term “Melting Pot” made its debut.

The term “Melting Pot” was first coined by Jewish Rabbi Samuel Schulman, who spoke of America as “the melting pot of nationalities” in a 1907 Passover sermon. But the term actually became popular through a drama that opened in Washington D.C. in 1908 written by Jewish playwright Israel Zangwill.

“Melting Pot” suggests (since it is literally a container where various and diverse substances are melted into one) that America was a place where a variety of ethnic groups fused together to produce one homogenous social, political and cultural entity—everyone became an American. This process, known as “naturalization,” included things like: the ability to read, write and speak English; an understanding of U.S.

history and government; a good moral character; attachment to the principles of the constitution; and so on.

The “Melting Pot” has slowly been supplanted by (if I may continue with a similar metaphor) numerous pots on the one stove of American soil. We are now a country of numerous languages, flags, political persuasions, etc. This cultural isolation and division, it can be easily argued, weakens a nation, especially if the nation (as in America’s case) which was founded on biblical principles, finds those principles under attack—toes of clay might be another suitable metaphor.

This is not a political sermon. I am merely making an observation vis-à-vis the stark reality of our time and place in history. I make this observation due to its unique impact of how it affects our understanding of the Great Commission. Let me explain.

Dissolving Churches

I have personally witnessed more than one (many more than one) white Anglo-Saxon church dissolve while the community surrounding it became populated by a different ethnic group, culture and ideology. Older people nurture a natural (and not completely unwarranted) fear and resentment when they see their communities transition from what was America to their own little pot on their own little burner. The recent Clint Eastwood movie, *Gran Torino*, quite excellently observes this phenomenon. He refused to move out of a community that had become completely populated by Asians, and he hated it and he hated them.

White Anglo-Saxon churches find themselves surrounded by Hispanic, Asian, Pacific Islanders, etc. And for a variety of reasons the people in these cultures choose not to attend the WASP churches. I have observed two major responses to this: an overreaction and a negative reaction.

Two Responses

Overreaction

The overreaction comes when churches (well-meaning perhaps) cater to this diversity by presenting a gospel that is not a gospel at all. They may appeal to man’s natural desire to fight against oppression or poverty or illness and promote (or at least emphasize) a gospel of social restructuring. This social gospel is resurfacing with the Emergent Church movement.

Although its adherents may not completely dismiss the atoning work of Christ on the cross, it is certainly de-emphasized.

Seeking to feed the hungry, house the homeless, bring aid to the ill and deliver the oppressed are strong Christian concepts. But if there is no gospel—a presentation and belief that Jesus came to save sinners by His death and resurrection—these Christian deeds will be short-lived. The hope for good things comes from circumcised hearts and the means by which God brings hearts of stone to hearts of flesh is through the preaching of Christ and Him crucified to save sinners.

Negative Reaction

The negative reaction (which I will call the “*Gran Torino Disorder*”) comes when Christians lose their ministerial focus because they begin to resent the influx of strangers in their own territory. Foreign languages, flags and ideologies are to be expected when we travel afar for ministerial purposes.

When Joshua Catron goes to Honduras this March on a mission trip, he knows he’s going to be confronted with an entirely different, non-American, culture. It would be silly for him to have any expectation of allegiance to America among the people to which he will be ministering. But the trip will end and he’ll return back to the states. What happens when Honduras moves onto Maple Avenue? That’s a hard pill for people to swallow.

My words are in no way designed to condone certain border violations that have become a major danger. They are designed to bring us to recognize that the “nations” of which Jesus speaks in this passage do not have to be abroad. The word Jesus uses is “*ethne*” from which we get our word ethnic. And as we discussed before, the “Go” is aorist, passive and can easily be translated “wherever you find yourself.”

Let’s back up a little.

All Authority

The Great Commission begins with a preamble. Before Jesus gives the church its mission, He declares the success of His own mission. “**All authority**” was given to Him. This was not something He received for free. Jesus paid the price to purchase that which had been usurped by sin and Satan. Jesus paid the price and now commissions His church to go and, if you will, pick up the goods for which He paid—this includes all things.

Go

The “Go” in the Great Commission is all encompassing. Wherever you find yourself your surroundings belong to God. As I have earlier pointed out, you needn’t get on a boat or plane or a bus. We live in a world that is owned by God (Psalm 24:1). This is something men are to be reminded of, wherever.

Make Disciples

The one command in the Great Commission is to “make disciples.” First and foremost, disciples are made by the grace of God through the preaching of the gospel (Acts 14:21; Mark 16:15; Romans 1:16; 1 Corinthians 1:21; Romans 10:14-17, etc.) The job of the church, individually and corporately, above all things, is to be Christ’s herald of good news. Our greatest enemy, the devil and his death, has been defeated. The means by which God applies this accomplishment to the hearts of men is by His Spirit through preaching of God’s word.

This is why, as a church, we seek to be emphatic about getting the message out. Whether it’s radio, newspapers, internet, e-mails, podcasts, sending hard-copies to prisons (as we have requested this week), we need to preach the gospel. And the primary place God meets men is within the context of the gathering of His people (Acts 2:47; 5:14; 11:24; 13:48). Nothing is more utilized by God to make disciples than the local church where the word of God is preached and the sacraments administered. This brings us up-to-date.

All The Nations

The commission to make disciples extends to all the nations. Again, the word Jesus uses is *ethne* from which we get our word ethnic. In the past reaching out to various ethnicities would require travel across borders. This is simply no longer the case.

Pentecost

Interestingly enough, the first major example in the Bible of the Great Commission did not require any border crossing. There was a festival where Jews “**from every nation (*ethnous*) under heaven**” (Acts 2:5, **parenthesis mine**) were gathered in Jerusalem. The holy day was called

Pentecost (also called Feast of Weeks—seven weeks after the first putting of the sickle to the grain—Deuteronomy 16:9).

The significance of Pentecost is often clouded by a lack of understanding of what primarily took place. Pentecost was not primarily an event of increased personal power in the Holy Spirit. The amazement associated with Pentecost was that **“everyone heard them speak in his own language” (Acts 2:6)**. Peter took this opportunity to preach the resurrection of Christ (Acts 2:24). And what was the response?

Now when they heard *this*, __they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, “Men *and* brethren, what shall we do?” -³⁸- Then Peter said to them, __“Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the _remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. -³⁹- For the promise is to you and _to your children, and __to all who are afar off, as many as the Lord our God will call” (Acts 2:37-39).

Peter and the apostles begin their obedience to Christ’s Great Commission right within the borders of Jerusalem. Men had begun the fruitless endeavor of seeking to build a tower to heaven and God graciously confounded those efforts by confusing their language (Genesis 11). At Pentecost God supernaturally makes the message clear.

All Things

But Pentecost was a uniquely religious, Jewish, event. The Apostle Paul, as the apostle to the gentiles (Romans 11:13), gives us an example of the kind of disposition we should seek to cultivate when it comes to winning souls and fulfilling this Great Commission to all the nations.

-For though I am __free from all *men*, _I have made myself a servant to all, __that I might win the more; -²⁰- and _to the Jews I became as a Jew, that I might win Jews; to those *who are under the law*, as under the __law, that I might win those *who are under the law*; -²¹- _to __those *who are without law*, as without law __ (not being without __law toward God, but under _law toward Christ), that I might win those *who are without law*; -²²- __to the weak I became _as weak, that I might win the weak. _I have become all things to all *men*,

__that I might by all means save some. ⁻²³⁻ Now this I do for the gospel's sake, that I may be partaker of it with you (1 Corinthians 9:19-23).

What does this passage mean? When Paul writes that he's not without law toward God, but under law toward Christ, he's communicating his responsibility to bring the message of the grace of Christ's cross to a lost world while not actually violating the law of God. In other words, Paul knew his boundaries. He knew what he was allowed, or even required, to give up and what he could never give up.

Paul did not unnecessarily offend Jews by snubbing their customs; he did not unnecessarily offend legalists that they might not reject him before he had a chance to speak; he did not unnecessarily offend gentiles by holding to Jewish customs in their presence; he did not strut his confidence before the weak, nor, little doubt, his weakness before the strong. Paul realized that there were customs and appearances that mean nothing to God but a great deal to man. He wouldn't have these trifles get in the way of the gospel.

In our efforts to make disciples of all the nations, we need to know our proper boundaries—what things are negotiable and what aren't. It is a dangerous place to be when you think your particular customs and subjective opinions are objective truth. The types of buildings we meet in, the manner of clothing we wear to church, the style of music utilized in worship, the way we greet and communicate with one another, what we eat, drink, hobbies we engage in and so on. There are places to set tight boundaries and places to set loose ones.

The church in America needs to understand (for better or worse¹) that the mission field has come to her.

Why America is Great

Keep in mind that the reason our nation is great is because the pilgrims, puritans, and founding fathers were themselves evangelized. But all this is secondary—there is a greater kingdom to be considered. Our Savior has won a great victory—the greatest victory. And He has called us to be His heralds and **“preach the gospel to every creature” (Mark 16:15).**

¹ I say “for better or for worse” due to the weakening effect multi-culturalism may have on America in a political sense, but better because of the immediate opportunities God is giving His church to preach the gospel to all the nations in our own back yard.

Questions for Study

1. What is meant by the term “Melting Pot” (page 2)?
2. How has the loss of the “Melting Pot” affected people’s attitudes (page 3)?
3. What are the two responses people might have to today’s cultural diversity (pages 3, 4)?
4. Review these terms and phrases in the Great Commission: “All Authority, Go, Make Disciples” (pages 4, 5).
5. What word does Jesus use for “nations”? Why is this significant (page 5)?
6. What is one of the first examples of the Great Commission being fulfilled? What happened there (page 6)?
7. What was the Apostle Paul willing to do to save souls? What was he unwilling to do (pages 6, 7)?
8. Why is America great? What is the higher kingdom to consider (page 8)?