

The Risen Jesus' Command and Promise

Matthew 28:1-20

Key Verse: 28:19, 20

by David Hull

“Therefore go 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 I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”

Last week we learned of how much Jesus suffered through his trial, crucifixion, and death. To unbelievers it seems like a very sad and tragic ending to an innocent man's life. But for Christ's followers we know the true meaning of his death opened the way back to God for us. This is not all. There is even better news. It is the greatest news in the history of the world and for all mankind. It is the news that He has Risen! Today the Risen Jesus gives us clear direction for our lives through the Great Commission. It is not only personal direction, but also direction for our church community. Jesus' command is not a burden, but it is a great privilege to help save souls who are suffering under the power of condemnation. We are not left alone to do this by ourselves. The Risen Jesus also promises that he will be with us forever. Let's think now about Jesus' Great commission and pray to participate in this life giving work.

I. He has risen (1-15)

Verse 1 reads, **“After the Sabbath, at dawn on the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to look at the tomb.”** Jesus had been crucified on Friday. Joseph of Arimathea had taken down Jesus' body and placed him in the tomb. Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of James and Joseph (likely Jesus' mother), witnessed this as they were sitting opposite the tomb. These women both mourned since they were loyal to Jesus. They remembered all he had done for them, especially Mary Magdalene who perhaps understood Jesus' grace most. Before she met Jesus, her life was meaningless and directionless. She was tormented by seven demons, but out of his mercy Jesus healed her and changed her life. Jesus became everything to Mary. But now through Jesus death, she was overpowered by deep sorrow. It seems that no one can defeat the power of death. Death is the cruelest enemy for mankind. The women had seen Jesus perform so many miracles, heal diseases, give sight to the blind, and raise the dead, yet even he seemed to surrender to the power of death. They were devastated as they returned home to observe the Sabbath.

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It was now early Sunday morning as the sunrise came over the horizon. Both Mary's returned to come and look at the tomb. The other gospels indicate they prepared spices to anoint Jesus' body. At the command of Pilate, the tomb had been made secure by putting a seal on the stone because of great concern something might occur around Jesus' tomb. Guards were placed to keep watch. There was no way anyone was getting in or out. Suddenly, it turned into a dramatic scene. According to verse 2, **“There was a violent earthquake, for an angel of the Lord came down from heaven and, going to the tomb, rolled back the stone and sat on it.”** What a shocking event! The stone which had been sealed in place was impossible to move. And yet this angel of Lord, with a quick flick of the pinky, brushed it to the side. He could have picked up the stone and threw it on the guards, but instead he calmly sat on it. This angel of the Lord was not dark in any way. He had the appearance of like lightning, and his clothes were as white as snow. The guards, who were otherwise known as brave and courageous men, became terrified and began shaking in their boots. They froze in fear like dead men.

It was not a time of terror and fear, for he came with good news. As angels normally do, this angel brought a message. Look at verses 5-6. **“The angel said to the women. ‘Do not be afraid, for I know that you are looking for Jesus, who was crucified. He is not here; he has risen, just as he said. Come and see the place where he lay.’”** The women had expected to see the body of Jesus who had surrendered to the cross and been laid to rest in the tomb. But the angel revealed the unexpected. Jesus was not there. He was nowhere to be found. You could not even track him with a GPS. Jesus had risen!

The angel revealed two clear evidences of the resurrection. **First, “just as he said”**. Jesus himself had prophesied not only his death but also the fact that he would rise from the dead on numerous occasions in Matthew's gospel. He spoke of this to his disciples and to the religious leaders as well. His resurrection was spoken of centuries before in the Old Testament through the Psalms and the prophets. Jesus' resurrection is a fulfillment of God's promise and verifies the authority of His word. When the angel said, **“come and see the place where he lay”**, it revealed the second evidence. When the woman went to look they found that the tomb was completely empty. We see there was no reason for the women to be afraid. The empty tomb of Jesus was good news. Actually, it is the most special tomb in history. There are other notable tombs that people visit each year such as Lenin's tomb, the Taj Mahal, or those of other religious figures. In my youth, I even once visited a famous tomb ... Elvis Presley's at his mansion called “Graceland”. Over the years some fanatics had spread rumors that he was still

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alive. But when I saw his grave next to both his parents', I even knew that Elvis is dead. When we visit these places we know that the bones of these individuals are still in the grave. But Jesus tomb is different. Jesus tomb is the empty tomb. The empty tomb of Jesus is the true "Graceland". Praise Jesus for he came to the world to die for our sins and rose again to give us new life according to God's promise. When we believe in his resurrection we too have the same hope that one day we will be raised to life like the Risen Christ. Praise Jesus for he has risen!

The angel next gave these women a command. Look at verse 7, **"Then go quickly and tell his disciples: 'He has risen from the dead and is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see him.' Now I have told you."** When the women heard this they had a sense of urgency. Just like an ambulance rushing through traffic to save people's lives, they hurried away from the tomb knowing the importance of the message to reach people dying in their sins. They were a bit afraid, yet filled with great joy. Their fear was different than the guards. It was a holy, reverent fear. Their joy was overflowing as they obeyed the angel to share the glorious message. When they did so, they had a surprise encounter. Verse 9 says, **"Suddenly Jesus met them. 'Greetings', he said. They came to him, clasped his feet and worshipped him."** What an incredible privilege it was to meet the Risen Jesus who said 'good morning' to the women. We see that they recognized him. His resurrection was a full bodily resurrection. He was not a ghost. They could physically touch him. They bowed low to the ground and embraced his feet, showing humility as Jesus became the true object of their worship. Jesus then reminded them of their mission as the first resurrection witnesses. He said, **"Do not be afraid. Go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee; there they will see me"**. Before meeting the Risen Christ, these women were filled with overwhelming despair. But now in encountering the Risen Jesus, they were completely changed. No longer were they swallowed up by the power of death, but found new hope and absolute joy.

Like the women, sometimes in our lives we can be overcome by fatalism and despair. It is because of the power of sin and death. Sometimes this can happen to Christians in the middle of our walk with Christ. Stephen Curtis Chapman has been one of the most popular Christian music artists for over the past decade. But a few years ago his family was struck with tragedy. They had adopted a young baby girl, Maria, from China. Stephen always felt a close connection with his new daughter. Then one day while one of their sons was returning home in his truck, he accidentally struck the 5 year old Maria in the driveway. She was pronounced dead at the hospital. Stephen cried out to God. He asked for His help to bring her back. Yet after a few minutes his wife Mary Beth said, "I really think we are supposed to

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let her go for now". For some time Chapman wrestled with his beliefs. He now had to cope with the loss of Maria, as well as take care of his whole grieving family, especially his son Will who had driven the truck. He doubted he would want to write a song and ever sing again. He had no desire to share that pain through music. But in time God helped him to overcome. He encountered Jesus newly and began writing music again. He released the album, "Beauty Will Rise," as his personal testament to Maria's life and the belief that they will be together again one day in God's kingdom. His wife also faced deep despair until she encountered Jesus who brought her healing. She once lived quietly behind the shadow of her husband, but now is witnessing to the power of Jesus' healing to many struggling women seeking guidance. The power of Jesus' resurrection helped this family conquer the sorrow and despair of this world and brought them new joy as God's servants. The Risen Jesus can help anyone and everyone in any situation. When we encounter the Risen Christ our lives can be turned around and we can be completely changed.

While the good news of the gospel was being spread to the disciples, there was also bad news. The devil was working behind the scenes. Some of the chief priests conferred with the elders making a plan to conceal the truth of Jesus' resurrection. They bribed the soldiers with large sums of money to say that the disciples had come in the night to steal Jesus' body. This was to appease the governor. It was a lie, one that would bear bad fruit and be spread among the Jews for generations. The religious leaders could have repented at the report they received. They didn't believe it because they didn't want to believe it. With their deceit and cover up, it further added to the evidence that Jesus had risen. The good news of Jesus defeats the power of the devil. The empty tomb will always remain empty no matter how man tries to hinder the truth. We must go and tell that He has risen!

II. The Great Commission (16-20)

After the disciples remembered Jesus' message to go to Galilee, they went there to the mountain where Jesus had told them to go. As he had promised, Jesus met them there. Just like the women verse 17 tells us they worshipped him. Still some doubted. We may wonder who the doubters were. Philip? Bartholomew? Thomas! Even though some doubted, they still worshipped him. Jesus did not rebuke them. Maybe this is comforting to some of us. We see that the disciples who journeyed to Galilee were both those who were strong in their faith, and those who were weak. But Jesus still had hope for each one of them. He knew that when they put their faith on him they would become changed men.

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As he was preparing to leave the world, Jesus wanted to empower them through his authority. Verse 18 says, **“Then Jesus came to them and said, ‘All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.’”** When we think about authority we may think about something like the authority of the President of the United States or maybe even our boss at work. But Jesus authority is greater. Jesus is the Sovereign God. He is King of Kings and Lord of Lords. Jesus defeated Satan and conquered death. He rose again from the dead, and now sits at the right hand of God the Father with the authority over heaven and all the earth. He holds the keys to life and death, and has the authority to forgive and to judge everyone's sin. It is this Jesus in all his authority who gave his disciples a command. It is the Great Commission. Look at verse 19. **“Therefore go 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 I have commanded you”**. Jesus' disciples were once very ordinary and fearful men. But when they received and obeyed Jesus great commission they became history makers. In the past they never thought about anyone else or any other countries. They worried about things like the cultural differences, language barriers, and visa problems. But when they accepted Jesus' command, God used them to do great things. They broke the barriers and went with the gospel to the Gentiles and changed the whole world.

Some may say that only the apostles were meant to receive the Great Commission. But William Carey said, no. As a young man in England in the late 1780s, he had the conviction that the church must take God's Word to every nation. Carey kept urging his fellow pastors to set up a missionary agency to help send people out, but they always seemed to have more urgent problems at home like money, mortgages, family and children. At one meeting an elder pastor reportedly snapped at him: “Young man, sit down. When God pleases to convert the heathen, he'll do it without consulting you or me.” Carey's concern was ignored until in 1792 he produced one of the most important books in all of church history: “An Enquiry Into the Obligations of Christians”. In it he argued that Christ's “Great Commission” was not just to the apostles but meant for Christians of all generations. It proved to be the spark of the modern Protestant missionary movement. Carey insisted that if Christians want to claim the promises of Jesus, they must also accept his commands. Soon after the publication he delivered a famous sermon in which he admonished Christian leaders to “expect great things from God; attempt great things for God.” Indeed, William Carey expected great things from God and he obeyed God. God used him to do great things by sending him as the first missionary to India.

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(Add connection to Carey story) We must have the same victorious spirit in doing the things for God. In 1886, the Student Volunteer Movement for Foreign Missions was started by 100 students. In one generation, nearly 100,000 students joined SVM campus groups and more than 20,000 of them sailed overseas to bring the Gospel to the unreached people groups worldwide. We can do the same when we have this vision. Our role in world campus mission is so important. Obeying the Great Commission must be our number one priority. He doesn't only want us to "Go and Tell", but he also commands us to "Go and make". (Peace family example)

How are we then to go and make disciples? We are to do it in two ways. **Firstly, we are to baptize in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.** Baptism means new birth. Jesus wants all sinners to come to him as we are. But he refuses us to remain that way. When one makes a commitment to Christ they must be new baptized and decide to live a new life following him. They must believe that Jesus died on the cross and rose again from the dead to save them from their sins and make a public declaration of this faith. Secondly, we are to teach potential disciples everything that Jesus has commanded us. As Walter Henrichsen wrote, "Disciples are made, not born". Obedience to God does not come naturally. In our sinful nature we only rebel against God. Therefore disciples must be taught the commands of Christ in order to learn the right way to live before God. When they learn obedience they can grow and mature into influential servants of God.

Some of us may feel like making disciples is just too burdensome. At times we may feel like we can't do it and just want to give up. But Jesus did not give us his command and then just leave us alone. In verse 20, Jesus concludes, "**And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.**" Jesus promises that he will help us. Jesus promises us that he will be with us. He isn't just going to be with us for one day. Jesus promises he will be with now and forever. There is no need to worry. If we need comfort, Jesus will give us comfort. If we need protection, Jesus will give us protection. Whatever it is we need, Jesus will provide us. He will be with us and use us as his team members. In world mission, we are part of either the going or sending teams. Some must go, others must send. We cannot all just go, some have to provide support and send. We cannot all send, obviously some have to go. They are both necessary. We have to pray and follow God's leading. If we are on the sending team now, maybe we can go in a few years, or 10 years, or even 20 years, we don't really know. It is up to God. Maybe some of us can be like Ms. Don Kuper's family, go to another nation and then come back to headquarters to train and send new missionaries out. Maybe we can

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go for the short term just like our African journey team that went across the world to bless God's work across the world. In the meantime we should simply obey his word and follow God's leading. Jesus is surely with us and will use us in the best way.

In 1996 Dr. Jim and Jennifer Rabchuk pioneered Western Illinois University. They heard Jesus command. Jesus didn't send them there to preach to the corn. He said, **"Go and make disciples"**. One day they met a graduate student in the theater department. He didn't really appear like a great disciple candidate for he just didn't care much about anything besides art and having fun. Outwardly, he looked fine and happy. But soon they realized he was a very broken young man full of sorrow and fear due to his parent's divorce and failed relationships. This young man was me. Through the study of God's word, my broken heart was healed. I met the Risen Christ and my sins were forgiven. I became a changed man. I felt so much joy that I could not keep it to myself. I had to share with others. I accepted the call to be a one to one bible teacher and campus shepherd. When I met the Rabchuk's it was their first year on campus. It was God's right timing and His grace to me. If they had not obeyed Jesus command to **"Go and make disciples"** or if they had not been sent by Chicago ministry, I would not be here today. After I graduated they sent me to Chicago to train and mature more as a disciple of Jesus. Now after 13 years in Chicago ministry God has raised me as a fellowship leader, a faithful servant, and member of our Sunday messenger team. All this has not been easy. I have had many struggles. But Jesus has always been with me. He gave his life for me on the cross and saved me from all my sin. He rose from the dead to give me new life and great joy. I really don't know where God will lead me or when I will go. But He will use me according to His plan and in His time. Through his authority, He will surely send me and my family out to another campus or to another nation to make disciples. Praise Jesus who is with us. We have now reached the conclusion of our Matthew's gospel study. From the beginning we learned Jesus is our king, the Immanuel God, who came to be with us. He is the one to follow, obey, and worship. Jesus overcame the power of death and rose again from the dead so that we could be free to serve him and obey his Great Commission. May God help us to participate in this great task and share the good news that Jesus is risen. May he make us a blessing to all people, baptizing many in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey all of Christ's commands. May we go with Jesus who is with us always, and make disciples of all nations.