

Session 1: Why We Go: The Great Commission

Passage: Matthew 28:16-19 (NIV)

¹⁶Then the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had told them to go. ¹⁷When they saw him, they worshiped him; but some doubted. ¹⁸Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. ¹⁹Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,

Key Idea: The Mission of God:

Mark 16:15 (NIV)

¹⁵He said to them, "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation.

As disciples, we are sent out by God to go out into the world. This is the mission he has given us! That we get to share with others the story of how God saved us from our sins and invite them to have their own personal relationship with Jesus Christ as their savior and lord.

Discussion Questions:

- Why is the Great Commission considered the mission of God?
- How does understanding the Great Commission impact the way you think about sharing your faith?

Key Idea: To All People:

John 3:16 (NIV)

¹⁶For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.

One of the best parts about the gospel is that it isn't just for those that "have it all together". Instead, it is for everyone! It doesn't matter how good or bad a person is, God so loved the world that every person is invited to into relationship with him through his son.

Discussion Questions:

- What does it mean that the gospel message is inclusive?
- What are some ways that you can show the inclusive nature of the gospel message in your personal life and interactions with others?

Key Idea: Through The Power of God:

Acts 1:8 (NIV)

⁸ But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”

Our encouragement is that everything God has called us to do for him, he has given us the power to accomplish it through the Holy Spirit. We can serve him in confidence knowing that it is God himself working in and through us!

Discussion Questions:

- How do we rely on the power of the Holy Spirit in fulfilling the Great Commission?
- Can you share a moment when you felt the Holy Spirit’s power helping you share your faith?

Application Questions:

- Do your daily actions, expressions and words naturally invite people to Jesus or push them away? What can you change about yourself today to help shift toward living a lifestyle of invitation?
- Is your heart burdened for or bothered by the lost? (Be honest!) When was the last time you prayed for a greater zeal for evangelism? What percentage of your group’s typical prayer requests relate to the eternal status of lost family, friends, coworkers and neighbors? Spend time in prayer to conclude your group meeting.
- In what ways are you allowing fatigue or the busyness of life to keep you from personal evangelism? How can you be more intentional about taking advantage of the moment and opportunities in the everyday to share the gospel with others?

Commentary

The great commission: The disciples meet Jesus at Galilee.

Matthew 28:16-17

Then the eleven disciples went away into Galilee, to the mountain which Jesus had appointed for them. When they saw Him, they worshiped Him; but some doubted.

a. **The eleven disciples went away into Galilee:** Matthew doesn’t tell us about the Jerusalem appearances of Jesus to His disciples, as John does. Matthew was more interested in showing that the promise of Jesus in [Matthew 26:32](#) was fulfilled.

- **To the mountain which Jesus had appointed for them:** “The meeting place would be some familiar haunt...only imperfectly recorded in the Gospels.” (Bruce)

b. **When they saw Him, they worshiped Him:** This was not their first meeting with the risen Jesus; but it was an important one. At this meeting, they received their apostolic commission.

c. **They worshiped Him; but some doubted:** The natural reaction to encountering the risen Jesus is worship, even if some had to overcome uncertainty and hesitation – probably from feeling it was too good to be true, and lingering shame from having forsaken Jesus during His suffering.

- “When they recognized him, it was natural that *they worshipped him*, but the whole experience was so mysterious and overwhelming that *some doubted*...The verb *distazo* does not denote a settled unbelief, but a state of uncertainty and hesitation.” (France)
- “Dunn sees Matthew’s mention of this doubt as ‘a genuine historical echo’ – those who were there would never have forgotten the conflicting emotions and beliefs in that unique experience.” (France)
- The fact that some of the disciples doubted argues against the theory that their seeing Jesus was simply a hallucination born of a desperate desire to see Him.

Matthew 28:18-19:

And Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, “All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. 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...

a. **All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth:** This commission that follows is given in light of the authority of Jesus. This indicates that this is an authoritative command, not a suggestion. It is the same idea as if an officer reminded a private of his rank before he gave the order. Because He has this **authority**, He can send whomever He wills to do whatever He pleases.

- “‘All’ dominates [Matthew 28:18-20](#) and ties these verses together: *all authority, all nations, all things, all the days.*” (Carson)
- “Power in the hands of some people is dangerous, but power in the hands of Christ is blessed. Oh, let him have all power! Let him do what he will with it, for he cannot will anything but that which is right, and just, and true, and good.” (Spurgeon)
- “We believe in this power, and we rest in it.” (Spurgeon)
 - *We do not seek any other power.*
 - *We defy every other power.*
 - *We know our powerlessness will not hinder the progress of His kingdom.*
 - *We give all our power unto Him.*
- “If Jesus Christ were not equal with the Father, could he have claimed this equality of power, without being guilty of impiety and blasphemy? Surely not; and does he not, in the fullest manner, assert his Godhead, and his equality with the Father, by claiming and possessing all the authority in heaven and earth?” (Clarke)

b. **Go therefore:** Because Jesus has this authority, we are **therefore** commanded to **go**. It is His authority that sends us, His authority that guides us, and His authority that empowers us. His work and message would continue to the world through His disciples.

- “These verses thus magnificently conclude the final section...but they also bring the whole Gospel to a dynamic conclusion, which is in fact more a beginning than an end.” (France)
- Jesus said, “**Go**” to some very imperfect disciples. “Who is to go out of that first band of disciples? It is Peter, the rash and the headstrong. It is John, who sometimes wishes to call fire from heaven to destroy men. It is Philip, with whom the Savior has been so long, and yet he has not known him. It is Thomas, who must put his finger into the print of the nails, or he will not believe him. Yet the Master says to them, ‘Go ye; all power is given unto me, therefore go ye. You are as good for my purpose as anybody else would be. There is no power in you, I know, but then all power is in me, therefore go ye.’” (Spurgeon)

c. **Make disciples of all the nations:** The command is to **make disciples**, not merely converts or supporters of a cause. The idea behind the word **disciples** is of scholars, learners, or students.

- **Make disciples** reminds us that disciples are *made*. **Disciples** are not spontaneously created at conversion; they are the product of a process involving other believers. This making of **disciples** is the power of spreading Christianity.

d. **Of all the nations:** In His previous ministry, Jesus deliberately restricted His work to the Jewish people (Matthew 15:24) and previously sent His disciples with the same restriction (Matthew 10:6). Only in rare exceptions did Jesus minister among the Gentiles (Matthew 15:21-28). Now all of that is in the past, and the disciples are commissioned to take the gospel to **all the nations**. There is no place on earth where the gospel of Jesus should not be preached and where disciples should not be made.

- “The aim of Jesus’ disciples, therefore, is to make disciples of all men everywhere, without distinction.” (Carson)
- “*Christ* commands them to go and baptize the nations: but how much time was past before such a journey was taken! And when the time was now come that this work should be begun, *Peter* doth not enter upon it without a previous admonition given him from heaven.” (Lightfoot, cited in Clarke)

e. **Baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit:** Significantly, when Jesus told them to go to **all the nations**, He did not tell them to *circumcise* those who became disciples. Instead, they were to baptize them, suggesting the break with traditional Judaism.

- “*In the name* is literally ‘*into* the name’, implying entrance into an allegiance.” (France)
- The words and context certainly indicate that it is **disciples** who are baptized, those of age who can be taught and who can observe the things Jesus commanded.
- Those who favor infant baptism answer, albeit unconvincingly: “But it doth not therefore follow, that children of such professors are not to be baptized, for the apostles were commanded to baptize *all nations*; children are a great part of any nation.” (Poole)
- **In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit:** “The experience of God in these three Persons is the essential basis of discipleship. At the same time the singular noun *name* (not ‘names’) underlines the unity of the three Persons.” (France)

Mark 16:15 (NIV)

He said to them, “Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation.

a. **Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature.** This was a *command*, not a suggestion. “Interest in missions is not an elective in God’s university of grace. It is something in which every disciple is expected to major.” (Ironsides)

- The idea of a faith that should **go into all the world** wasn’t a part of the Jewish thinking in the days of Jesus. It wasn’t part of the pagan thinking either. It was a revolutionary idea in its time.
- This command was not obeyed immediately; for many years, the disciples stayed at Jerusalem, and it was only until the church was persecuted that it began to spread out to the world. But it did spread and continues to.
- “An army chaplain once said to the Duke of Wellington, ‘Do you think that it is of any use our taking the gospel to the hill tribes in India? Will they ever receive it?’ The duke replied, ‘What are your marching orders?’ That was the only answer he gave. Stern disciplinarian as that great soldier was, he only wanted marching orders, and he obeyed; and he meant that every soldier of the cross must obey the marching orders of Christ, his great Commander.” (Spurgeon)

John 3:16 (NIV)

“For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.”

a. **For God so loved the world:** John 3:16 has long been celebrated as a powerful, succinct, declaration of the gospel. Of the 31,102 verses in the Bible, it may be the most popular single verse used in evangelism.

- We learn the *object* of God’s love: **For God so loved the world**. God did not wait for the world to turn to Him before He loved the world. He loved and gave His only begotten Son to the world when it was *still* the **world**!
- What Jesus told Nicodemus in John 3:7 (*You must be born again*) refuted the popular Jewish idea regarding the *way* to salvation. Now Jesus refuted the popular Jewish idea regarding the *scope* of salvation: **for God so loved the world**.
- The Jews of that day rarely thought that God **loved the world**. Many of them thought that God only loved *Israel*. The universal offer of salvation and life in Jesus was revolutionary.
- “The Jew was ready enough to think of God as loving Israel, but no passage appears to be cited in which any Jewish writer maintains that God loved the world. It is a distinctively Christian idea that God’s love is wide enough to embrace all mankind.” (Morris)
- Morrison suggested that there are three centers of love:

God so loved the world (John 3:16).

Christ also loved the church (Ephesians 5:25).

The Son of God, who loved me (Galatians 2:20).

b. **He gave His only begotten Son:** This describes both the *expression* and the *gift* of God’s love. God’s love didn’t just *feel* for the plight of a fallen world. God *did* something about it, and He **gave** the most precious thing to give: **His only begotten Son**.

- **He gave his only begotten Son:** “These words seem to carry a reference to the offering of Isaac; and Nicodemus in that case would at once be reminded by them of the love *there required*, the *substitution there made*, and the *prophecy there uttered to Abraham*.” (Alford)

c. **Whoever believes in Him:** This describes the *recipient* of God’s love. God loves the world, but the world does not receive or benefit from that love until it **believes in** Jesus, the gift that the Father gave. **Believes in** means much more than intellectual awareness or agreement. It means to *trust in*, to *rely on*, and to *cling to*.

d. **Should not perish:** This describes the *intention* of God’s love. God’s love *actually saves* man from eternal destruction. God looks at fallen humanity, does not want it to **perish**, and so in His love He extends the gift of salvation in Jesus Christ.

e. **Everlasting life:** This describes the *duration* of God’s love. The love we receive among people may fade or turn, but God’s love will never change. He will never stop loving His people, even unto the furthest distance of eternity.

- o We may say there are Seven Wonders in John 3:16.

<i>God</i>	The Almighty Authority
<i>So loved the world</i>	The Mightiest Motive
<i>That He gave His only begotten Son</i>	The Greatest Gift
<i>That whoever</i>	The Widest Welcome
<i>Believes in Him</i>	The Easiest Escape
<i>Should not perish</i>	The Divine Deliverance
<i>But have everlasting life</i>	The Priceless Possession

- o “If there is one sentence more than another which sums up the message of the Fourth Gospel, it is this. The love of God is limitless; it embraces all mankind. No sacrifice was too great to bring its unmeasured intensity home to men and women: the best that God had to give, he gave – his only Son, his well-beloved.” (Bruce)

Acts 1:8 (NIV)

But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”

a. **But you shall receive power:** If the national kingdom they wanted would be delayed, the **power** they needed would not. They would soon receive power with the coming of the **Holy Spirit**.

- o With their question about the restoration of the kingdom to Israel, it is possible that the disciples still saw **power** too much in terms of Caesar’s kind of power, and not enough in terms of God’s kind of power.

b. **And you shall be witnesses to Me:** The natural result of receiving this promised power would be that they would become **witnesses** of Jesus, all over the earth.

- Notice that this really wasn't a command; it was a simple statement of fact: **When the Holy Spirit has come upon you... you shall be witnesses of Me.** The words **shall be** are in the indicative, not the imperative. Jesus didn't recommend that they become **witnesses**; He said they would **be witnesses**.
- If we want to **be witnesses**, we need to be filled with the Holy Spirit. The best training program for evangelism is of little effectiveness without the filling of the Holy Spirit.
- Isaiah 43:10 has the Lord proclaiming to His people *You are My witnesses*. A cultic group today claims that this is their mandate for being "Jehovah's Witnesses." Unfortunately, they fail to see Isaiah 43:10 in the context of Acts 1:8; we are truly *Yahweh's Witnesses* when we are *Jesus' Witnesses*.