**Sermon Text – Matthew 28:18-20**

**01/16/2022**

**Do We Really “Love”?**

**Introduction ~**

An old church leader was intoning a long and complicated prayer and, in his stereotypical phrases, he included, “Oh Lord, touch the unsaved with thy finger.” As he said this, he suddenly stopped short. The pause in his prayer stretched out… The silence began to get uncomfortable, until another member of the church went to his side, concerned that he might be ill. “No,” the leader replied, “but something seemed to say to me, ‘Thou art the finger!’”[[1]](#footnote-1)

Now, we all know that we’re supposed to be active in spreading the Gospel of Jesus Christ, and some among us are vocal and active in sharing Jesus. But for most of us… not so much! It seemed to me that, after taking a brief look at life in the Spirit and how that should play out in our lives, it would make sense to look at the calling of the Church universal in some detail.

**Context ~**

So, we’ve started out the year looking at the work of the Spirit in the various ways that He is involved with each of us. We’ve found that there is a purpose to His work. He equips us and empowers us to do what we could not otherwise do. It’s through Him that we’re equipped to do the things Jesus commanded us to do. One of those things is recorded in Matthew 28:18-20 ~

18And Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, “All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. 19Go 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, 20teaching 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.[[2]](#footnote-2)

So we have this brief little passage, only two verses out of the 31,102 verses in the Bible. Doesn’t it seem like it should get more press than that if it’s all that important? So… why is there this focus on Evangelism? Why risk rejection, criticism, humiliation, or even outright violence in our own culture? Why spend all that money? Why make the sacrifices required to tell people about Jesus in foreign cultures? In fact, these cultures often don’t want to hear what we have to tell them.

So why do we tell people about Jesus? There are two very good reasons; first we have the Great Commission, which we’ve already noted in Matthew 28:18-20 ~

18And Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, “All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. 19Go 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, 20teaching 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.[[3]](#footnote-3)

But we also have the Great Commandment found in Matthew 22:37-39 ~

37Jesus said to him, “ ‘*You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.’* 38This is *the* first and great commandment. 39And *the* second *is* like it: *‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’* [[4]](#footnote-4)

Starting with these two passages we’re going to spend a few weeks thinking about what this is, and how it plays out in the life of the Church, and in the life of each follower of Jesus.

**The Great Commission ~**

We’ll start with the Great Commission since this is the parting command of the Lord Jesus Christ to His Church. Most of you are pretty familiar with it, although it has been called, by some, “the Great Omission!”

Here are Jesus’ final words to His followers before He ascended into heaven. He opens by telling His disciples that, as a result of the victory won on the cross, He now reigns supreme.[[5]](#footnote-5) Matthew 28:18 ~

18And Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, “All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth.[[6]](#footnote-6)

Jesus opens the conversation with a vitally important introduction prior to formally commissioning the disciples; that is the assurance of His authority.[[7]](#footnote-7) This “authority,” (ἐξουσία)[[8]](#footnote-8) [ĕx-ou-siʹa], refers to the power of choice, that is, the liberty of doing as one pleases.[[9]](#footnote-9) This is understood as divinely granted authority with the freedom to act unilaterally.[[10]](#footnote-10) This includes not just the ability to choose to do what He wants, Jesus also had/has the power required to do whatever He wants.[[11]](#footnote-11)

So, as the Son of man, Jesus has received from the Father supreme authority in heaven and earth.[[12]](#footnote-12) This authority extends over the entire kingdom of God to its fullest extent.[[13]](#footnote-13) There is an interesting aspect to this. Jesus can only make the claim for this authority if He is fully God since the whole universe is embraced in the authority delegated to him.[[14]](#footnote-14) It is a statement of His intrinsic divinity. Yet even in this, Jesus is still distinct from the Heavenly Father, and it is because of this that Matthew uses the divine passive in speaking of His having “been given” this authority.[[15]](#footnote-15)

This power, or authority, is “given” (Εδοθη)[[16]](#footnote-16) [ĕd oʹ thē] to Jesus. The passive verb assumes that it is God who is the acting subject[[17]](#footnote-17) and the man, Jesus is the recipient; Romans 1:3 ~

…3concerning His Son Jesus Christ our Lord, who was born of the seed of David according to the flesh,[[18]](#footnote-18)…

It is the resurrection that serves as the affirmation of this, even though Jesus had already affirmed His full authority.[[19]](#footnote-19) Romans 1:4 ~

… 4and declared *to be* the Son of God with power according to the Spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead.[[20]](#footnote-20)

As one who experiences a new order of existence, Jesus now speaks with authority.[[21]](#footnote-21) Accordingly, He has “all authority in heaven and on earth,” that is, He speaks with the sovereign authority of God.[[22]](#footnote-22) As you might expect, Jesus then uses His authority to set into motion His plans and purposes; Matthew 28:19 ~

19Go 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,[[23]](#footnote-23)…

**Go ~**

With this authority, Jesus then gives His followers the command to go, to make disciples, to baptize, and to instruct.[[24]](#footnote-24) That command was not limited to the twelve Disciples, there were over 500 present, it was given to the entire Church.[[25]](#footnote-25) 1 Corinthians 15:6 ~

6After that He was seen by over five hundred brethren at once, of whom the greater part remain to the present, but some have fallen asleep.[[26]](#footnote-26)

So it is difficult to argue that the command to “go” is limited to only His twelve disciples. This “go” is really a participle, “going” (πορευθεντες)[[27]](#footnote-27) [pŏr eū thĕnʹ tĕs]. It conveys ongoing movement from one destination to another, to be on one’s way.[[28]](#footnote-28) You could read it, “As you go through life, make disciples…” although we don’t want to minimize or ignore the traveling aspect of this command.

**Authority ~**

As we do this “going,” we aren’t doing it based on our own authority; 2 Corinthians 5:20 ~

20Now then, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were pleading through us: we implore *you* on Christ’s behalf, be reconciled to God.[[29]](#footnote-29)

God’s operation in the world is based on the principle of delegated authority.[[30]](#footnote-30) Most of the time, God works through His people; people who have been supernaturally empowered to do what He asks us to do. Our being sent in Jesus’ authority provides us with the authority required to “go.”[[31]](#footnote-31)

The connection between the authority of Jesus and the authority we work under as we fulfill the tasks He has assigned is made plain in the connective (οὖν), “therefore;”[[32]](#footnote-32) Matthew 28:19 ~

19Go 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,…[[33]](#footnote-33)

**The Only Verb ~**

The commission is given through a single main imperative verb, (μαθητεύσατε), [mă thē teuʹ să tĕ],[[34]](#footnote-34) “make disciples,” which is followed by three subordinate participles that take on the force of a command because of the main verb.[[35]](#footnote-35) Now, I know that many of you don’t care for these grammatical details. So let me just say that, regardless of the grammatical details, the universal authority of Jesus stands as the foundation for the universal mission of the church.[[36]](#footnote-36)

The word “make disciples” (μαθητεύω) [[37]](#footnote-37) [mă thĕ teuʹ ō] means to make “learners” or “pupils” of Jesus.[[38]](#footnote-38) The emphasis of the commission therefore falls on the more difficult and time consuming task of nurturing and teaching rather than simply evangelizing.[[39]](#footnote-39) This emphasis is strengthened and expanded on through the instruction to be “teaching them to keep all that I have commanded”.[[40]](#footnote-40)

**All of Us ~**

To make disciples is a multifaceted task involving preaching the Gospel, but also doing what’s necessary to lead the pre-Christian to a full willingness to become a Christian.[[41]](#footnote-41) But it doesn’t stop there, either. It involves teaching, guiding, mentoring, the word is actually discipling, them to do something; Matthew 28:20a ~

…20teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you;…[[42]](#footnote-42)

Teaching obedience to all of Jesus’ commands is at the core of all disciple making.[[43]](#footnote-43) If non-Christians are not hearing the gospel, and then being challenged to make a decision for Christ, then the church has disobeyed one part of Jesus’ commission.[[44]](#footnote-44) If new converts are not then faithfully nurtured and instructed in the whole counsel of God’s revelation, then the church has disobeyed the other part.[[45]](#footnote-45)

There has to be a healthy balance of “outreach” and “in-reach.”[[46]](#footnote-46) To be made a disciple of Jesus means, above all, to follow after righteousness as Jesus taught.[[47]](#footnote-47) It is to bask in the wonder of God’s grace as we receive forgiveness. In response to that grace, we receive cleansing and a change in priorities.

This requires that all of our differing spiritual gifts must be used in developing these new disciples, and leading them to operate in their own strengths and giftedness, whether in evangelizing or nurturing, speaking or serving.[[48]](#footnote-48)

**All Nations ~**

The scope of this commission is really almost mind-boggling; Matthew 28:19 ~

19Go 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,[[49]](#footnote-49)…

This word “nations” isn’t a reference to nationalities or countries, it’s more involved than that. The word is (ἔθνος)[[50]](#footnote-50) [ĕthʹ nŏs] and denote a group of people who are associated visibly and according to experience.[[51]](#footnote-51) The common expression is “people group.” A people group is usually defined by a common language and culture, and there may be many people groups within any single nation.

To “make disciples *of all nations*” requires that there will be followers of Jesus who will leave their homelands in order to tell other cultures about Jesus.[[52]](#footnote-52) We do not, and cannot minimize that.[[53]](#footnote-53) But the Great Commission is more than merely cross cultural missions, Jesus’ primary focus is on the task that all believers have to duplicate themselves… regardless of where they may be.[[54]](#footnote-54)

So, first, why do we evangelize? Well, because Jesus speaks with the authority of God. He speaks with God’s authority because He is God. God has entrusted us with the ministry of reconciliation;[[55]](#footnote-55) 2 Corinthians 5:18-19 ~

18Now all things *are* of God, who has reconciled us to Himself through Jesus Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation, 19that is, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing their trespasses to them, and has committed to us the word of reconciliation.[[56]](#footnote-56)

**The Great Commandment:**

It is at this point that we need to stop and consider our motivation.

After all, even folks with bad manners now how to be polite to those who can do something for them.[[57]](#footnote-57)

What is it that motivates us to undertake a task that’s enormous, expensive, and sometimes quite dangerous? Well… that brings us to the second reason why we evangelize. Because we love; Matthew 22:37-39 ~

37Jesus said to him, “ ‘*You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.’* 38This is *the* first and great commandment. 39And *the* second *is* like it: *‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’*[[58]](#footnote-58)

This question was the one question the Pharisees agonized over but could never adequately answer.[[59]](#footnote-59) Here Jesus answers that question concisely by drawing from the Shema, something the Jews were very familiar with since it was recited twice daily by every devout Jew.[[60]](#footnote-60) This is found in Deuteronomy 6:4-5 ~

4“Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord *is* one! 5You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength.[[61]](#footnote-61)

With this, Jesus defines the greatest commandment,[[62]](#footnote-62) and the motivation for the actions we take. If our love for God is sincere, then it requires more than mere words, it must move into action. To truly love God is not simply to “have good feelings about Him,” it’s more than tearing up while we sing in worship; true love will always involve the will as well as the heart.[[63]](#footnote-63) This will then be expressed through service and obedience.[[64]](#footnote-64)

**It Starts with God ~**

The first and greatest commandment is to love God with all that we are, heart, soul, and mind.[[65]](#footnote-65) This refers to a wholehearted devotion to God in every aspect of one’s being.[[66]](#footnote-66) This kind of love for God will necessarily result in obedience to all that He has commanded.[[67]](#footnote-67) There’s no room for hypocrisy, we are to be consumed by our love for Him in response to Him. 1 John 4:19 ~

19We love Him because He first loved us.[[68]](#footnote-68)

That love for us is expressed in very practical ways; Ephesians 2:4-9 ~

4But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, 5even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), 6and raised *us* up together, and made *us* sit together in the heavenly *places* in Christ Jesus, 7that in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. 8For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; *it is* the gift of God, 9not of works, lest anyone should boast.[[69]](#footnote-69)

And so, we respond in love. Therefore, when He tells us to go into all the world, we do so. We evangelize because we love God. Because we love God, we believe that He deserves praise and worship, and we know that He is not yet receiving all of the praise and worship that is due Him.[[70]](#footnote-70)

**Then We Love Others ~**

Jesus opened with love for God, but the He continues with a companion commandment, which is really nothing less than a way of presenting a comprehensive picture of one’s duty to God which is expressed through how we treat the brothers and sisters of the human family;[[71]](#footnote-71) Matthew 22:37-39 ~

37Jesus said to him, “ ‘*You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.’* 38This is *the* first and great commandment. 39And *the* second *is* like it: *‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’*[[72]](#footnote-72)

So, typical of Jesus, He’s not content to stop half-way. Going beyond the original question, Jesus added a second commandment[[73]](#footnote-73) that is a reference to Leviticus 19:18 ~

18You shall not take vengeance, nor bear any grudge against the children of your people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I *am* the Lord.[[74]](#footnote-74)

Jesus saying, “The second is like it,” probably means that this commandment is of equal importance.[[75]](#footnote-75) These are foundational to our faith.[[76]](#footnote-76) Love for God must lead to love for others, or love for God is not real.[[77]](#footnote-77) Our love of God must manifest and actualize itself by love expressed to the inconvenient people around us.[[78]](#footnote-78) This concept is repeated throughout the New Testament; 1 John 4:20-21 ~

20If someone says, “I love God,” and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen, how can he love God whom he has not seen? 21And this commandment we have from Him: that he who loves God *must* love his brother also.[[79]](#footnote-79)

If you’re curious about the extent of this love for others, Jesus gave us that measure as well;[[80]](#footnote-80) Matthew 7:12 ~

12Therefore, whatever you want men to do to you, do also to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets.[[81]](#footnote-81)

If we love the people around us, we will not seek to do anything that would bring harm.[[82]](#footnote-82) That’s simple enough to understand, at least in principle. But this goes way beyond doing no harm. We will actively seek to bring about good for them.

So we need to understand exactly what evangelization, done God’s way, really is. To evangelize is to tell someone about the love of God expressed through Jesus Christ as the sacrifice for their sin.[[83]](#footnote-83) It is to tell them about the Gospel of grace, it is to tell them of the lavish love of a God who sacrifices to save people who stand in rebellion against Him. The contrast we draw as we tell about what Jesus accomplished is described in Romans 5:18-19 ~

18Therefore, as through one man’s offense *judgment* came to all men, resulting in condemnation, even so through one Man’s righteous act *the free gift came* to all men, resulting in justification of life. 19For as by one man’s disobedience many were made sinners, so also by one Man’s obedience many will be made righteous.[[84]](#footnote-84)

Because the stakes are high, if we love people, we will seek to evangelize them, not as something we do to them, it is something we do for them… because we love them. Evangelism is not a recruitment program for God’s labor force, it is a liberation project where people are delivered from bondage to sin and demonic forces.[[85]](#footnote-85) The Scriptures are clear, apart from a saving faith in Jesus Christ people are lost to eternal judgment.[[86]](#footnote-86)

In doing all of this, we have to be careful about balance. We can never allow evangelism to become an idol replacing our love of God.[[87]](#footnote-87) He is the reason and motive for all we do. We love Jesus first and foremost.[[88]](#footnote-88) Because we love Jesus we obey Him. Because we love Jesus, we love those He has placed in our paths. Because we love those God has placed in our paths we tell them about the love of God that we ourselves have received.

**Application ~**

Why do we evangelize? Because Jesus told us to, because we love Him, and because we love the people around us… and we want them to experience the love of God for themselves.

But note this; obedience to Jesus’ command is not limited to pastors, teachers, or evangelists. Making disciples requires worship, instruction in service, intercession, gifts of mercy, faith. If we’re going to be obedient to Jesus’ command to make disciples it will take all of us.[[89]](#footnote-89) We’ll get to that over the next couple of weeks.

For today, how does this resonate with you? Do you find that you love Jesus to the extent that it changes how you live? Do you find that, because you love Jesus, you also love those around you? Do you find that this love prompts you to seek the best for them?

This kind of love is described in 1 Corinthians 13:4-8a ~

4Love suffers long *and* is kind; love does not envy; love does not parade itself, is not puffed up; 5does not behave rudely, does not seek its own, is not provoked, thinks no evil; 6does not rejoice in iniquity, but rejoices in the truth; 7bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

8Love never fails.[[90]](#footnote-90)

If this does not describe you, what are you going to do about it?

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4. [The New King James Version](https://ref.ly/logosres/nkjv?ref=BibleNKJV.Mt22.37&off=0&ctx=ndment+in+the+law?%25E2%2580%259D%250A~37%25C2%25A0%25E2%2580%25A2Jesus+said+to+hi) (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1982), Mt 22:37–39. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. John Peter Lange and Philip Schaff, [A Commentary on the Holy Scriptures: Matthew](https://ref.ly/logosres/lange61mt?ref=Bible.Mt28.18&off=265&ctx=r+is+given+unto+Me.%25E2%2580%2594~Expression+of+His+gl) (Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 2008), 556. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
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8. Thomas Newberry and George Ricker Berry, [The Interlinear Literal Translation of the Greek New Testament](https://ref.ly/logosres/tr1550int?ref=Bible.Mt28.18&off=63&ctx=%25CE%25B5%25CE%25B3%25CF%2589%25CE%25BD+%25CE%2595%25CE%25B4%25CE%25BF%25CE%25B8%25CE%25B7+%25CE%25BC%25CE%25BF%25CE%25B9+%25CF%2580%25CE%25B1%25CF%2583%25CE%25B1+~%25CE%25B5%25CE%25BE%25CE%25BF%25CF%2585%25CF%2583%25CE%25B9%25CE%25B1+%25CE%25B5%25CE%25BD+%25CE%25BF%25CF%2585%25CF%2581%25CE%25B1%25CE%25BD%25CF%2589+%25CE%25BA%25CE%25B1) (Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 2004), Mt 28:18. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
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10. Gerhard Kittel, Gerhard Friedrich, and Geoffrey William Bromiley, [Theological Dictionary of the New Testament, Abridged in One Volume](https://ref.ly/logosres/tdnta?ref=Page.p+239&off=389&ctx=lect+God%25E2%2580%2599s+lordship.~+Third,+as+a+divinel) (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans, 1985), 239. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
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