

INTRODUCTION

This is the final message in the series "Parables and Miracles." This miracle wasn't just one Jesus performed 2,000 years ago. It's a miracle He is still performing. I want to examine the Great Commission under the title of "Sharing the Miracle of Salvation."

I'd like to compare the Great Commission to something everyone here easily recognizes: Coca-Cola. A pharmacist, Dr. John Pemberton, invented Coca-Cola in Atlanta, Georgia in 1886. He concocted a caramel-colored syrup in a brass kettle in his back yard. Coke was basically an American drink until the company got serious about global expansion in the 1970s. The executives set a goal of making Coca-Cola available to every person on the planet. Remember the song, "I'd like to teach the world to sing in perfect harmony...?"

They are close to reaching their global goal. A recent survey revealed that 97% of the world's population has heard of Coca-Cola. 72% of the world's people have seen the Coca-Cola logo, and 51% of the world's population has tasted a Coke. Every day, there are 1.6 billion servings of Coke.

With such amazing global expansion over the past 125 years, someone said if Jesus had given the Great Commission to the Coca-Cola Company, the gospel would have already been presented to every person on earth! But He didn't give the Great Commission to Coca-Cola, or Apple, or McDonald's. He gave it to us!

The last words a person speaks before they die are usually remembered as being profound or valuable. A man who mentioned that his elderly father had recently died. Someone said, "What were his last words?" The son said, "Dad didn't have any last words. Mother was with him until the end."

These words of Jesus aren't His last words before He died, because Jesus isn't dead. But these are the last words He gave to His disciples before He returned to heaven. He saved the best for last.

Matthew 28:16-20. "Then the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had told them to go. When they saw him, they worshiped him; but some doubted. Then Jesus came to them and said, 'All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. 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.'

On November 9, 2009, the assault ship USS New York was commissioned for service in the U.S. Navy. What made this commissioning special was the fact that her bow was made with 7.5 tons of steel from the World Trade Center. Thousands attended the commissioning in NYC, and after the National Anthem was played, the order was given, "Man your ship!" And with this commissioning, the USS New York was launched with the mission of protecting and serving the citizens of the U.S.

We understand the importance of the commissioning of a navy vessel, but do we really take seriously the commissioning Jesus gave us? He launched the church to go into every part of the world and make disciples. But for many people, the Great Commission has become the Great Omission. When a church doesn't make evangelism and missions their priority, they practice the Great Omission. A Christian who never attempts to share his faith has embraced the Great Omission.

The great missionary leader Hudson Taylor said: "The Great Commission is not an option to be considered; it is a command to be obeyed." Let's unpack what Jesus was saying when He called us to share the miracle of salvation with every person on the planet.

I. Jesus gave us the greatest authority

Jesus said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me."

Two milk cows were eating grass when a milk truck drove by. A sign on the truck said, "Fresh milk. Homogenized, Pasteurized, fortified, Low-fat, Vitamin-enriched." After reading the descriptions, one cow said to the other, "It kinda' makes you feel inadequate, doesn't it?"

Can you imagine how inadequate the disciples must have felt when they heard this command?

Maybe Simon Peter spoke up and whined, "But Lord, we're just a little handful of uneducated fishermen and common folks. We have no money, no machinery, and no means. Maybe we can hang around here and make an impact on the Galilee, but do really want us to go to 'all nations?' How can we stand before the military might of the Roman Empire? How can we argue with the sophistication and intellectualism of the Greeks? Lord, we can't do it!"

And the Lord said, "No you can't do it. That's why I'm giving you both the authority and the power to do it." Jesus claimed to have all authority in heaven. That means whenever Jesus speaks in heaven, it is done. He also claimed to have all authority on earth. And He has given that authority to us. And in Acts 1:8 He said, "You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses...to the ends of the earth."

There's a difference between power and authority. If you have authority, but no power, your authority is useless.

A government man was taking geological readings for the Department of the Interior. He approached one farmer and said, "I've been authorized by the government to go out into your pasture and take some readings. Do you mind if do that?" The farmer said, "You can't go out in my pasture." The government man got a little perturbed and brought out a piece of paper signed by the Secretary of the Interior that gave him the authority to take his readings anywhere he chose. He showed it to the farmer and said, "There, see? I have the authority to go into your pasture." As the government man started climbing over the fence the farmer said, "I'll tell you again, you'd better not go out into my pasture." The government man arrived in the middle of the pasture and was setting up his equipment when the ground began to shake. He looked up and saw a mean old bull running toward him with his head lowered. The government man forgot his

equipment and started running as fast as he could for the fence. He cried out to the farmer, "Help me!" The farmer said, "Show him your papers!"

He had the authority, but he didn't have the power to be in that field. Jesus has given us BOTH the authority and the power.

Have you ever seen a police show where someone is fleeing arrest? The officer often says, "Stop in the name of the law!" He's not telling that person to stop in his own name, but he is saying it under the authority of the law.

We don't go out and share the gospel in the name of Baptists, or in the name of America, or in our own name. We share the gospel in the name of Jesus, because He has given us the authority and the power.

John Stott wrote: "His authority on earth allows us to dare to go to all the nations. His authority in heaven gives us our only hope of success. And His presence with us leaves us no other choice."

II. Jesus gave us the greatest assignment

Here is the assignment Jesus gave us: "Go and make disciples of all nations." The word "nations" doesn't mean countries with boundaries like Canada, Mexico, or Peru. It is the word *ethnos*. It means we are to take the good news to every ethnic group on earth. When you live in town like Tyler where there is a church on every corner, you sometimes forget that most of the population of the world has no access to the gospel message. That's why we are engaged in taking the gospel to the ends of the earth.

I agree with Oswald Chambers who wrote: "No one has the right to hear the gospel twice, while there remains someone who has not heard it once." Another missionary leader named Oswald J. Smith wrote: "We talk of the second coming of Christ, when half of the world has never heard of the first."

A. As you go, make disciples!

I first memorized the Great Commission in the KJV version where Jesus says, "Go ye, therefore and teach all nations..." But the word "go" isn't a simple verb; it's a participle, which is best translated, "going." So this isn't a command for us to get up and go to someplace we've never been to before, like Africa or China. Jesus said, "As you're going through your normal traffic patterns of life, make disciples."

How do we "make a disciple?" The word "disciple" means "follower" so we are to share our faith with people who aren't yet following Jesus so they make the choice to follow Jesus. This isn't something you do on Tuesday nights armed with a list of prospects and gospel tracts. This is something we do seven days a week—it isn't an activity, it's a lifestyle.

As a pastor, I get the joy of leading many people to Christ. We are to be fishers of men, but many times my sharing is like shooting fish in a barrel. I have people who set up an appointment to

come see me and they tell me their life is a wreck; I get the privilege to lead them to Christ.

Here's how I do it. I ask them, "Suppose you stand before God tonight and He asked you, 'Why should I let you into my heaven?'" Then I listen. The answer of a follower of Jesus can always be recognized, but if the person answers something like, "I'm a pretty good person." Or "I don't know" I proceed to share the plan of salvation with them.

I take a little Bible and I turn to Romans 3:23, and I let that person read it. "For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." I ask them how many lies does it take to make a liar? Does this mean you and I are sinners? Next, I turn to Romans 6:23 and let them read that verse. "The wages of sin are death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Jesus Christ our Lord." And I ask them if they've ever had a job where they were paid wages. I tell them what we earn for our sins is spiritual death—separation from God forever and ever. But I explain salvation is gift. The gift is eternal life, and it's in Jesus Christ. I take a card and place it in the Bible and say, "Imagine this card is eternal life and this Bible is Jesus Christ. The card is in the Bible. If you want the card, you must take the Bible. If you want eternal life, you must receive Jesus.

Then I turn to John 1:12 and let them read this, "But as many as received him, he gave the power to become the sons of God, even to those who believe on his name."

I tell them becoming a Christian involves believing, but it also involved receiving. When you receive Jesus as your Lord and Savior, you can have the gift of eternal life. At this point I hold out a dollar bill and say, "Imagine for a minute that I knew you had a need in your life and I loved you enough to give you a dollar. Here, this dollar is yours." I hold it in my hand, and if they don't take it, I say, "Why don't you have it yet?" They say, "Because I haven't received it." I say, "Go ahead and take it." They do, and I tell them, "You could have believed that was a dollar bill, and you could have believed I wanted to give it to you, but it wasn't until you reached out and took it that it became yours. You can believe that Jesus loves you and wants to save you, but you won't be saved until you receive Him into your life.

The final verse is Revelation 3:20. I let them read where Jesus said, "Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him, and he with me." I explain that the door is the door of their heart, and I ask them if they would like to pray and invite Jesus to come into their life and forgive their sins. It's amazing how many people are weeping at this point and they say, "Yes, I would." Then I lead them in a short prayer that I ask them to repeat after me: "Dear Jesus, I admit I'm a sinner. I want to receive the gift of eternal life. So right now, Jesus, come and live in my heart. Take away my sins, and make me a new person. Thank you Jesus for coming into my heart. Amen."

Then I always smile and ask, "Where is Jesus right now?" And they say, "He's in my heart."

Have you ever done that? Have you ever tried to lead someone to become a follower of Jesus?

A student once asked Charles Spurgeon, "What about the heathen who have never heard. Will they be saved?" Spurgeon replied, "That's not the question that haunts me. The question I have is: what about us who have the gospel and never share it, will WE be saved?"

B. Baptize new believers!

Why do we baptize believers? Because Jesus commanded us to do it! Romans 6 tells us that baptism is a powerful symbol of the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus. Baptism represents our death and burial—but the only mourner is the devil, because it symbolizes the death of the old person you were before Jesus saved you. And when you come up out of the water it's a picture of the new life you have in Christ.

Baptism identifies you with Jesus and with other followers of Jesus. At the beginning of His public ministry Jesus was baptized by John. If there was ever a person who didn't need to be baptized, it was Jesus. But He did it to set an example for us. So when we're baptized, we identify with him.

I'm often asked, "Pastor, can you go to heaven without being baptized?" My answer is, "Theoretically, yes, but WHY would you want to?" Jesus commands us to be baptized and if you are going to claim that He is your Lord, you must obey Him.

Never minimize the value of a symbol. Next Sunday at our 9/11 Remembrance Service we're going to say the Pledge of Allegiance to the American flag. That's like baptism. That flag isn't our nation; it symbolizes our nation. Baptism isn't salvation, but it symbolized salvation. When you stand and place your hand over your heart and say the pledge you are identifying yourself with America and with the other Americans doing the same thing. When you stand in the baptismal waters and say, "Jesus is my Lord" you are saying, "I'm not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes." (Romans 1:16)

You can't really obey this part of the Great Commission unless you've been baptized yourself. Have you been baptized by immersion since you placed your faith in Jesus? If you haven't, you can make arrangements for your baptism today.

C. Teach them to be disciple-makers!

There is a powerful cycle here. We're to make disciples, baptize them, and then teach them to obey what Jesus has taught us. And Jesus taught us to make disciples. So when you get down to it, our job isn't to make disciples. It is to make disciple-makers. If all we ever do is share the gospel with them, and then "dip 'em and drop 'em." We haven't fulfilled the Great Commission. We must teach them to become disciple-makers. That's why we put so much emphasis on the Sunday Morning Bible Study Ministry in Green Acres.

If all you do is attend worship, but you never join a small group where discipleship training takes place, you are facing the possibility of stunted spiritual growth in your life. If someone loved you enough to lead you to Christ, but you've never led someone to Christ, the divine cycle has been broken.

We must continually communicate the need for a passion for lost people. As you look around your relationships in East Texas, chances are you have some friends and family members who

don't know Christ. What are you doing about it? Will you ask God to give you a burden for lost people? Will you ask God to burden your heart for the lost? Are you committed to the Great Commission, or are you ignoring it and embracing the Great Omission?

Charles Spurgeon wrote: "If sinners be damned, at least let them leap to Hell over our bodies. If they will perish, let them perish with our arms around their knees. Let no one go there unwarned and unprayed for."

III. Jesus gave us the greatest assurance

Jesus said, "And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age." The good news is we aren't in this alone. Jesus has promised that He will be with us in this task of reaching the nations.

When was the time in your life when you were most aware of the presence of Jesus with you? Was it when a loved one died? Was it when you were lonely and afraid? Let me answer that question. In my life I have found that Jesus Christ is never more real to me, and never more near to me than when I am talking to a lost person about salvation. There have been times when I've been talking to a lost person and I will say things I can't believe are coming out of my mouth. It's almost like I'm a third person observing what Jesus is saying through me, and I'm thinking, "Wow, I can't believe I said that!"

In Matthew 10:19-20, Jesus told the disciples that when they were arrested, they didn't have to give a thought about what to say, because the Holy Spirit would be speaking through them. Have you ever had that experience?

Here's my challenge to you. This week, enter into a conversation with someone you suspect is not a follower of Jesus Christ. Just bring up the subject of Jesus, the Bible, or heaven. And as you are having that conversation, Jesus will be so real and close to you that He will be giving you the words to say.

Folks, we're living in desperate times. There has never been a time when the gospel is more needed in our nation. With all the political and economic upheavals, we're tempted to think our world will improve when those things are corrected: Let's pay off the national debt; let's put the right person in the White House. But the only hope for a messed up world is faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

My friend, Danny Akin, is President of the Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary in Wake Forest, North Carolina. I read something he said in a message and it resonated with my heart. He said, "Governmental legislation will not stop the moral plunge of our nation and the world, but the gospel will! Our hope is not in Republicans or Democrats, Congress or Capitol Hill. Our hope is in Calvary's Hill and a crucified and risen Savior named King Jesus. Neither Jesus nor His disciples exhausted their time trying to change the government. They spent their time trying to change the souls of men. We must do no less."

Someone loved you enough to share the good news with you. Who do you love enough to share that same gospel story? Who do you know who needs the love of God in their life?

You might have heard of Dr. Howard Hendricks. He has taught at Dallas Theological Seminary for the past 60 years. Dr. Hendricks spoke here at Green Acres when we were dedicating our Worship Center. He is a great Christian leader who has made a tremendous impact on the Kingdom through his teaching, writing, and speaking. For eight years he served as the chaplain to the Dallas Cowboys when Tom Landry was coach.

God used an ordinary Sunday School teacher who practiced the Great Commission to reach Howard Hendricks. Howard was born into a broken home in Philadelphia. His grandparents raised him; and his grandfather was an alcoholic. Howie, as he was known as a boy, grew up getting in all kinds of trouble. More than one of his teachers told him they expected him to end up in prison.

There was a little Baptist church not far from where Howie lived, and in that church was a man named Walt. Walt asked to teach a children's Sunday School class. He was turned down because he only had a sixth grade education, but the pastor told him if he could go out and round up some young boys, the church would find him a room.

Here's how Dr. Hendricks describes what happened. "Walt came down my street one day looking for boys for his Sunday School class. Well anything that had 'school' in it was a bad-news item to me. Then Walt said, 'Well, howd'ya like to play marbles?' That was different. Then this tall, thin man stooped down and whipped me in every game of marbles we played. I lost my marbles early in life, (Dr. Hendricks chuckles). But this man with barely a sixth-grade education loved boys in a way that drew them irresistibly to Jesus Christ. Wherever Walt was going, I wanted to go, he became my spiritual father. From Walt's first class of thirteen boys from the streets, eleven of us eventually entered the Christian ministry: Two became professors, six became missionaries, and three became pastors." That's the cycle of disciple-making!

CONCLUSION

Perhaps you've heard of Penn and Teller the comedy team who has worked Las Vegas for years. Penn Jillette is an atheist, but he recorded a video journal a few years ago telling the story about a man who waited to speak to him after one of their shows. Penn said the man was a successful businessman and was "very sane and sincere" and looked him right in his eyes. The man was very complimentary of the show, and then he did a strange thing. He gave Penn a Gideon's New Testament and inside the cover wrote a personal note and left phone numbers and an email if Penn wanted to talk to him about the message of the New Testament. Penn said nobody had ever done that to him before. On the video he says, "If you believe that there's a heaven and a hell; and people could be going to hell; or not getting eternal life or whatever, and you think it's not really worth telling them this because it would make it socially awkward; and atheists who think people shouldn't proselytize...just leave me alone, keep your religion to yourself. How much do you have to hate somebody to not proselytize them? How much do you have to hate someone to believe that everlasting life is possible, and not tell him or her that? I mean if I believed, without a shadow of a doubt, that a truck was coming at you and you didn't believe it? And that truck was bearing down on you? There's a certain point where I tackle you. And this is MORE important than that."

There you have it; a confirmed atheist telling us that if we believe there heaven and hell exists, and if we believe there is eternal life, and we DON'T tell others; then it shows we must really hate them.

Actually, the Bible teaches that it is the love of Christ that constrains us to urge people to be reconciled to God. The Great Commandment Jesus gave was to love God with all of your being, and to love your neighbor as yourself. If you truly believe and obey the Great Commandment, then you'll be practicing the Great Commission.

Will you join me in recommitting ourselves to share the good news of Jesus Christ with people across the street and across the globe? Whenever someone places his or her faith in Jesus, a miracle happens. God miraculously transforms them from a guilty sinner into a forgiven Child of God. Let's go out and share this miracle of salvation!

OUTLINE

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To put it in Texas terms, “You’re mighty welcome to use any and all of my ingredients; just make your own chili!”

For the Joy...
Pastor David Dykes