

## The Great Commission Passages & Mission-focused Living

### Prayer

### Introductory Questions

- What does Jesus send his people into the world to do?
- What obstacles interfere with you pursuing Jesus's mission for the church?

### Introduction

This lesson explains the mission of the church—also known as Jesus's Great Commission. The following points provide context for our study.

1. **A broad understanding of the church's mission includes *the major motivations* (such as loving God and loving people) and *the major responsibilities* of the people of God (such as helping people to follow Jesus, serving those who are less fortunate, transforming social structures, and/or caring for creation).** But if “mission” includes nearly everything Christians value and do, its usefulness as a category largely disappears.
2. **We adopt a narrower definition of mission—a task or objective, or something we are sent to do.** When defining our mission, we seek to answer the question, “what did Jesus directly commission the apostles (and the rest of the church) to do after he left the earth?” Or, more simply, “what does Jesus send us into the world to do?”
3. **Jesus presented his Great Commission to his disciples and therefore to all Christians in no less than seven passages of Scripture:** Matthew 28:18–20; Mark 13:10; 14:9; Luke 24:44–49; John 20:21–23; Acts 1:8; 26:16–18). There are not multiple commissions from Jesus. There is one commission from Jesus, which he revealed at different times and places, and with different emphases.
4. **The heart of the Great Commission is to “make disciples of all nations” (Matt. 28:19).** This mission includes both evangelizing non-Christians and discipling Christians (DeYoung & Gilbert, *What Is the Mission of the Church?*, 15–63).
5. **From one generation of Christians to the next, we must study what Jesus taught about the church's mission, embrace it as our own mission, and pass it on to the next generation.** If we faithfully teach others the mission of the church, then they can faithfully teach others the mission. Like sprinters in a relay race, our goal is to cleanly pass on the baton of Jesus's mission from one runner to the next—until Jesus returns.

We organize and discuss the Great Commission passages below based on the books of the Bible in which they appear: (1) Matthew, (2) Mark, (3) Luke, (4) John, and (5) Acts. The goal of this lesson is not to study each passage in detail. Instead, *our goal is to gain a comprehensive overview of Jesus's mission.* With that in mind, we conclude this lesson by summarizing the mission of the church.

## 1. Matthew: Make Disciples of All Nations

18 Jesus came near and said to them, “All authority has been given to me in heaven and on earth. 19 Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, 20 teaching them to observe everything I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.” (Matt. 28:18–20)

The resurrected Jesus revealed to his disciples his universal authority, which he received from God the Father (v. 18). The central command in this passage is to *make disciples* (followers of Jesus) of all nations (v. 19). Going into the world (v. 19), baptizing believers (v. 19), and teaching them to observe everything Jesus commanded (v. 20) are necessary parts of the process.

What comments or questions do you have about these verses?

## 2. Mark: Proclaim the Gospel to all Nations

- “And it is necessary that the gospel be preached to all nations.” (Mark 13:10)
- “Truly I tell you, wherever the gospel is proclaimed in the whole world, what she has done [anointing Jesus with perfume] will also be told in memory of her.” (Mark 14:9)

In broadest terms, the gospel is the good news that God has intervened to save his people (Isa. 40:9–11; 52:7–10; 61:1–3). That is the banner that flies across his pursuit of sinful humanity. More narrowly, the gospel is the good news that God has intervened to save his people *through Jesus Christ* (Mark 1:1). At the beginning of Jesus’s earthly ministry, he said, “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the gospel” (Mark 1:15). But when Jesus spoke the words recorded in Mark 13:10 and 14:9, his disciples did not understand the gospel as it would unfold. Soon enough, they came to understand the blazing center of the gospel: the good news that Jesus died and God raised him from the dead to save sinners (1 Cor. 15:1–4). That is the good news we proclaim in all the world.

What comments or questions do you have about these verses?

## 3. Luke: Proclaim Jesus’s Death and Resurrection, Repentance, and Forgiveness

44 He told them, “These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you—that everything written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets, and the Psalms must be fulfilled.” 45 Then he opened their minds to understand the Scriptures. 46 He also said to

them, “This is what is written: The Messiah will suffer and rise from the dead the third day, 47 and repentance for forgiveness of sins will be proclaimed in his name to all the nations, beginning at Jerusalem. 48 You are witnesses of these things. 49 And look, I am sending you what my Father promised. As for you, stay in the city until you are empowered from on high.” (Luke 24:44–49)

Jesus appeared to his disciples to prove his resurrection (Luke 24:36–43). The Old Testament pointed to and was fulfilled in Jesus, which he enabled his disciples to understand (vv. 44–45). Scripture predicted that the Messiah would suffer and rise from the dead on the third day (v. 46). Scripture also predicted *the proclamation* of “repentance for forgiveness of sins” in Jesus’s name to the nations (vv. 47–48)—all by the power of the promised Holy Spirit (v. 49).

What comments or questions do you have about these verses?

#### 4. John: Sent by Jesus, Empowered by the Spirit, Granting Forgiveness

21 Jesus said to them again, “Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, I also send you.”  
22 After saying this, he breathed on them and said, “Receive the Holy Spirit. 23 If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained.”  
(John 20:21–23)

The resurrected Jesus appeared to his disciples and greeted them with peace (vv. 19, 21). Just as God the Father sent Jesus into the world, so Jesus sends his disciples into the world (v. 21; cf. Matt. 28:19; John 17:18). At this point, the (partial) gift of the Spirit and Jesus’s teaching about forgiveness foreshadowed and clarified how the mission would proceed—by the power of the Spirit and with a view toward granting forgiveness (vv. 22–23; cf. Luke 24:47; Acts 1:8).

What comments or questions do you have about these verses?

#### 5. Acts: Serve and Witness to Jesus by the Holy Spirit

- “But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come on you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.” (Acts 1:8)
- “16 But get up and stand on your feet. For I have appeared to you for this purpose, to appoint you as a servant and a witness of what you have seen and will see of me. 17 I will rescue you from your people and from the Gentiles. I am sending you to them 18 to open their eyes so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan

to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a share among those who are sanctified by faith in me.” (Acts 26:16–18)

Before Jesus ascended to the Father, he’d predicted the coming of the Spirit, who would empower the disciples to witness to Jesus’s death and resurrection—witnessing from Jerusalem to the ends of the earth (Acts 1:8). After Jesus ascended, he appeared to Saul (later known as the apostle Paul) to appoint him “as a servant and a witness” of what he had seen and would see of Jesus (Acts 26:16). Jesus was sending him to the Jews and the gentiles “*to open their eyes so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a share among those who are sanctified by faith in me*” (vv. 17–18).

What comments or questions do you have about these verses?

### **Sound Doctrine: Mission-focused Living**

How can we summarize and integrate these passages? The Old Testament Scriptures pointed to and were fulfilled in Jesus (Luke 24:44–46). God the Father sent Jesus into the world and gave him all authority in heaven and on earth (Matt. 28:18; John 20:21). Based on these great truths, Jesus commissioned the church *to make disciples of all nations* (Matt. 28:19), which is the heart of the Great Commission. As essential parts of the process and by the power of the Holy Spirit (Luke 24:49; John 20:22; Acts 1:8), we must:

- go into all the world, to all nations (Matt. 28:19; John 20:21; Acts 26:17);
- proclaim Jesus’s death and resurrection (which is the gospel) (Mark 13:10; 14:9; Luke 24:46, 48; Acts 1:8, 26:16);
- proclaim repentance (turning from sins), trust, and forgiveness of sins in Jesus’s name (Luke 24:47; John 20:23; Acts 26:18);
- baptize *new* believers in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit (Matt. 28:19); and
- teach *all* believers to obey Jesus’s commands (Matt. 28:20).

Viewed collectively, that is the mission of the church—what Jesus sends us to do. Jesus is present with us to guide and empower us as we pursue his mission, until the end of the age (Matt. 28:20).

As you consider the holistic mission of the church as outlined above, identify one or more areas where you would like to be more faithful. How can you grow in that area?

### **Prayer**