

The Great Commission - *Matthew 28:16-20*

Introduction

- Elaine and I have been here in Toronto for just over a week. We've been struck by just how many people live in this city. It's a much larger city than either of us are used to.
- And one of the things that I've appreciated since moving here is that our apartment has a window, right in front of me actually, that looks out towards the Toronto skyline, and at night we like to look out that window, at all of the windows that are lit up in so many buildings, and think about just how many people live so close to me, and I wonder how many of those people have never heard the Gospel before.
- Even within this one building that we live in here, there are probably more people than were in our entire neighbourhood in St. Catharines, and it does feel a little overwhelming at times.
- But as I think about just how many people live here in Toronto, so close to me, I'm really excited that we as a church are starting into a sermon series where we'll be looking more in depth at evangelism. This is so important for our church.
- We're coming right out of our series where we looked at the Heart of Christ series. We've seen so many beautiful things about Jesus and all that he's done. Now in this new series we're going to answer the question "Where do we go from here?"
- I was reading in a course that Darryl sent to me, put together by a church called Capitol Hill Baptist. In the introduction to their evangelism course, there was a line that really stood out to me. It said:
 - *"The Bible is very clear that we are accountable for what we know".*
- Their goal was to say that their course was not meant to be learning for learning's sake, but it was intended to be put into practice. They wanted their course to train people to share their faith, so that people would actually do it. As Christians the same is true for us, that we are accountable for what we know.
- We've spent so much time looking at the heart of Christ, and we've been so amazed by him, so the question for each of us, and for us as a church becomes, What are we going to do with that? What will we do with everything that we've just learned? Because we have a responsibility now to do something with what we've learned.
- The title of this series is **"Too good not to share"**, and I think that's really fitting because we just can't help it once we're confronted with the greatness of Christ, it is something that needs

to be shared. I want us to look at this series in the same way that Capitol Hill approached their evangelism course. We are not just talking about evangelism for the sake of talking about it, our heart is that we would be equipped and challenged as a church to share the Gospel with others, and then that we would go and do it.

- So to start off this series, we're going to look at one of the most well known passages that deals with evangelism, Matthew 28:18-20, which is also called the "great commission".

Jesus tells us what we're supposed to do - The Mission

- This famous command from Jesus comes right at the end of Matthew's Gospel, and it is taking place not long after his resurrection. Jesus meets with his disciples, and here at the end of the book, he gives them one last instruction. Knowing that he will soon be leaving them, he "commissions" his followers to go and do something with everything that he's taught them, and everything that has been revealed to them. And this is a commissioning that is as much for you and I today as it was for the disciples back then.
- This entire passage hinges around V. 19 and the beginning of V. 20, in which we see what Jesus is actually calling us to do. He gives us "the mission" Look at what he says.

"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 all that I have commanded you." - Matt. 28:19-20a (ESV)

- This is the mission that Jesus gives to everyone who follows him, and there's a number of different parts to it.
- He begins by telling us to go and make disciples.
- To start, when he tells us to "go", he's instructing us to be the ones taking the initiative here. We're not called to just sit and wait for people to come to us so that we can share the Gospel, Jesus commands us to take action here, to go and make disciples.
- We as a church are not called to sit and wait, hoping that people will come to us wanting to hear about Jesus, we're called to be actively engaging with the world and the community around us, getting to know our neighbours, talking with people that we work with, actively looking for opportunities to share the Gospel.
- Leon Morris writes a helpful comment on what it actually means when Jesus is calling us to "make disciples".
 - *"In this Gospel a disciple is both a learner and a follower; a disciple takes Jesus as his teacher and learns from him, and a disciple also follows Jesus."*

- Essentially what he's telling his disciples to do here is to go and reproduce themselves. Jesus called them to leave their old lives to follow him. They were his followers and his students, living with him and learning from him, and he's telling them to call people to that same life. Not that they are trying to gather disciples for themselves, but rather they are calling people to be followers of Jesus and to learn from him.
- In this verse Jesus is telling us to call people into the same life that we have found in him.
- But it doesn't stop there. he also commands his followers to baptize those disciples in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.
- This is the reason that we as a church see baptism as so important once someone has come to faith in Christ, because Jesus himself commands it. He assumes that once a person has given their life to him as a disciple, that baptism is the next logical step in that process. Publicly identifying as one of Christ's disciples. Those who have given their life to Christ are called to live in obedience to Jesus' instruction here, to be baptized in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.
- So I would challenge you that if you are a follower of Christ, and have never taken that step of obedience in baptism, to get in touch with Darryl as I know he'd love to chat with you about that.
- And finally Jesus calls us to teach them to observe/obey God's commands
- There is a lasting involvement that is implied here. Jesus is not giving us a one-and-done method of evangelism in which we have one conversation with people, help them pray a prayer, then leave them to figure things out on their own. Jesus instructs us to take time to teach people what it means to follow him, teaching them to live in obedience to his commands.
- This is something that you see lived out in the life of Paul, when he would visit a new city and plant a new church, he wouldn't arrive one day and leave the next. He would sometimes spend years teaching people in a new city, and even after he left we have many different letters that he wrote to the churches that he visited, continuing to teach them, even after he'd left.
- When we share the Gospel and see people trust in Christ, there is a responsibility to continue teaching them to observe all that Christ has commanded. Maybe that means inviting them to come out to church, maybe that means committing to meet with them each week to work through God's Word and learn how to follow him, but our calling does not end once we see people trust in Christ.
- Now I want to take a moment to point out here, that Jesus is making an assumption here, that to live out this mission, requires that we ourselves are living our lives as disciples of Christ, committing our own lives to learn from him, and follow him, and live in obedience to his commandments.

- If we want to be calling people to this kind of life in Christ, to live as his disciples, we have to first be committed to living this life ourselves. It's pretty hard to call others into a life that we are not willing to live ourselves.
- This "Great commission" that Jesus gives is one that we really want to be living out as a church. We want our church to be one which is characterized by the desire to share the Gospel with those around us, and see others become disciples of Jesus Christ.
- But Jesus doesn't just tell us what to do in this passage. This mission that he gives to us is right in between two promises, or reassurances from Jesus, as he gives us both the motive and the method for what he has called us to here.

Jesus tells us why we're supposed to do it - The Motive

- At the beginning of V. 19 we see the word "therefore", so that verse, that mission that we've been given by Christ, is the continuation of something that he's already been saying. When he tells us "Go, therefore..." he's saying "Because of this, go...", so in the earlier verse we see Jesus explain to us why it is that we are called to share our faith, "The motive". The reason that we are called to go and make disciples, and look at what he says here:

"And Jesus came and said to them, 'All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.'"
 - Matt. 28:18 (ESV)

- So Jesus tells his disciples that he has been given all authority in heaven and on earth, and because of that they are called to go and make disciples.
- This again goes back to the idea that the disciples, as well as we ourselves, are now accountable for what we have learned about Christ.
- Look at everything we've learned about Christ in the past number of weeks, and everything that he taught his disciples in the upper room. Look at everything that he has revealed to us about himself through his death and resurrection. He has revealed himself as God. The ultimate King, and ruler over all creation and has power and authority even over death, yet still made himself a servant and a saviour on our behalf so that we could have a relationship with God. Isn't that something that is too good not to share?
- This is not something that we can just keep to ourselves. When Jesus tells us to make disciples, this is the message that he is calling us to share with them. This is the Gospel, the truth of how great Jesus is, and how amazing his love for us is. It is this love and authority of Christ that motivates us to make disciples in his name.
- And our goal in this is to give glory to Christ as our king, and call others to do the same. In Bible School, one of the lines I heard repeatedly was that our theology should lead us to

doxology. What that means is that as we learn more about who God is, it should cause us to worship him all the more because of who he is, and it should cause us to live out this commission, because of who Christ is, to call people to a life of living as disciples of Christ for his glory.

- Jesus has all authority in Heaven and on Earth therefore let us as a church commit to make disciples, sharing the amazing news of what he's done with the city of Toronto, and the world.

Jesus tells us how we're able to do it - The Method

- I don't know about you, but at times, this seems like such an insurmountable task. When I think about the number of people in Toronto, even just the people living in Liberty Village, it seems so overwhelming to think of carrying out this mission that Christ has given us to make disciples. So how exactly are we meant to do this? To make disciples?
- Well, Jesus ends this great commission in the second half of V. 20 with wonderful words of promise and reassurance, giving us hope for how we will be able to carry out the instructions that he has given us. Look at what he says, his final words in this book:

"And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age." - Matt. 28:20b (ESV)

- Jesus gives us this amazing promise, that as we are carrying out the mission that he's given to us, we are never doing it alone.
- Leon Morris writes,
 - *"the disciple is not going to be left to serve God as well as he can in the light of what he has learned from the things Jesus has commanded. The disciple will find that he has a great companion as he goes on his way through life."*
- This is such a great reassurance for us. Christ does not expect us to undertake this mission on our own, or to do it by our own strength, but rather he promises to be with us, to help us carry out this mission that he has give us.
- This is something that Paul understood, look at what he says in (Philippians 4:12-13)

"I know how to be brought low, and I know how to abound. In any and every circumstance, I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and need. I can do all things through him who strengthens me." - Phil. 4:12-13 (ESV)

- These words from Paul are so significant because he wrote them while he was in prison for sharing the Gospel. Paul was one of the greatest examples of living out the great comission that we have in all of history, and he faced constant trouble and challenge because of it, but in

these verses we can see that no matter what he faces, or what challenges come his way as he is following Christ and living in obedience to him, he knows that Christ is giving him the strength to continue on following him.

- This is “The method”, the way that we are able to live out the Great Commission that Jesus has given us. We know that he is with us, giving us the strength that we need to live in obedience to him.
- This can also give us reassurance because we know that this mission does not rest on our shoulders alone. It is not “us against the world” here. As we face the world, sharing the message of the Gospel, whether they accept this message or reject it, we can be comforted knowing that we are not doing this alone, but with Christ who has promised that he will always be with us.

Conclusion

- So in these few verses, Jesus answers the “what now” question. He has given us clear instructions on what we are to do with everything that we’ve learned about him, the mission, the motive, and the method.
- The introduction to this course continued with this line, *“This course is intended to be put into practice”*, and I would say the same for us as a church that “The Gospel, and the Great Commission is intended to be put into practice in our lives and in our church”.
- So what is our mission as a church? When you go on to our website, one of the first things that you see on there is the words *“Introducing Liberty Village to the beauty of a relationship with Jesus”*.
- This is our heart and our mission as a church, that we would introduce our community to Jesus Christ, and invite them into relationship with him.
- We want to see our community, and our city transformed with the truth of the Gospel, and the only way that we are able to do that, is if we are living out this great commission that Jesus has given to his followers, taking Jesus’ words here, and living them out in our own lives.
- We must be committed as a church to reproducing ourselves, making disciples, inviting people to be followers and learners of Jesus, because of the great truths that he has revealed about himself in his Word, and doing it through his strength, remembering that he has promised to be with us, to the end of the age.
- I know that Darryl has mentioned a number of times that our church has a goal to reach 1% of Liberty Village with the Gospel, to begin by seeing 100 people come to know Christ, and become disciples of him, and the way that we will see that happen is by living out this great mission.

- In the coming weeks we will be talking much more about how we actually go about doing this, and what it looks like to share our faith, we will also have a few practical tools to share that you can use in sharing your faith with others, but today our goal is to really understand why we do this, and why it matters so much. Because this is what Christ has called and commanded us to do.
- And so our main take away from this passage. That Jesus has called us as a church, to live out this great commission, of making disciples with his help and for his glory.