

The Great Commission

Evangelism Sermon and Study Group Lesson

By Mark Snowden



This sermon was developed for use with “The Macedonia Project,” a five year plan to mobilize healthy churches from across Missouri and have them “come over and help” churches in Kansas City and St. Louis metropolitan areas. It is done in collaboration with the GPS 2016-20 emphases on Personal Evangelization and Starting Something.

Introduction: Scripture: Matthew 28:16-20

High up in the Ozarks there’s a story about a church built on a steep hill. Through a set of unfortunate circumstances, a casket was not fastened into the hearse. While the pallbearers went inside to get the flowers at the funeral, the casket slid out of the hearse and began sliding down the steep hill. It narrowly missed a car and picked up speed. At the bottom of the hill was a dead end and a drug store straight ahead. The casket hit the curb and flew through the plate glass window. It took out two rows of sundry items and slammed to a halt right in front of the pharmacist. The lid flew open and the dead guy sat up and said, “Doc, do you have anything to stop this runaway coffin?” The world is looking for answers to its runaway condition. They’re turning to anyone that can help them.

Jesus had just been raised from the dead. Judas had taken his own life by this point. Jesus had told His disciples to meet him on a mountain in Galilee. This scripture is what happened when they met again. This study is important because it addresses doubts and also encourages believers to make not just new converts, but become lifelong followers of Jesus.

1. Handling Doubts – Matthew 28:16-18

Exploration: Jesus’ remaining 11 disciples were obedient. They headed to a mountain that Jesus had told them to visit. As they were approaching they saw Him and began to worship Him. They lavished praise! You can imagine their joy! But some just couldn’t handle it. Some doubted. In the original text, there can be two meanings for the word “doubt.” They either weren’t sure it actually was Jesus or they lacked direction. Because Jesus immediately drew near and gave them direction, the second meaning is more likely. And because Jesus has “all authority” there is no reason to doubt Him.

Interpretation: There are other times in Scripture where Jesus’ followers lacked direction. In Acts 16, we see Paul and his companions lacking direction. The Spirit of

Jesus and the Holy Spirit had blocked their way north, east, and south. Then Paul had the vision of a man from Macedonia saying, “Come over and help us” (Acts 16:9). Those in his missionary band immediately realized this was the direction they needed to go. They broke camp and headed out.

Whenever we lack direction, we merely need to worship Jesus because only He has authority to forgive sins and provide direction for your life. Allow Him to draw near to you! He’ll give you direction. Are you willing to obey His directions?! Jesus’ disciples began making disciple-makers in Jerusalem and eventually across the Roman Empire. Paul crossed over into Europe from Asia. It was a huge step of faith, but they went.

Application. Do you lack direction? Worship Jesus as your Lord and Savior. Repent and believe is your first act of worship. Surrender your life, your will, to Jesus and Jesus alone. Then get ready to obey Him.

2. Making Disciples – Matthew 28:19

Exploration: The idea in the original Greek is one of “as you go, make disciples.” For a long time in history, Christians assumed this was a command for the original 11 disciples and that was all. However, missionary pioneers like William Carey came to understand the command being for every Christian everywhere!

“All nations” in the Greek is *pant ta ethne*. It’s from the word *ethne* that we get the word ethnic. It literally means every people group, not just geopolitical entities. We don’t just color in the countries on a map, but seek to evangelize people who are like us and not like us, even if they live next door.

Baptism means to fully immerse. It is a word from the textile industry in which cloth was dipped into permanent ink, forever changing the original color. Rick Warren, Saddleback Church, once described baptism as “being saturated in the colors of God.”¹ We are baptized in the Trinity – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Interpretation: A disciple is a person who follows the teachings of someone. It can be someone like Buddha, Muhammad, or Jesus. What does it mean to “make disciples”? Avery Willis defined discipleship as “following Jesus that is a lifelong, obedient, relationship in which he changes my character into Christlikeness, my values into kingdom values, and invites me to join Him in His mission in the home, the church, and the world.”²

¹ Rick Warren, “40 Days of P.E.A.C.E.,” Saddleback Church, unpublished, 2005.

² Avery T. Willis, Jr., and Mark Snowden, *Truth That Sticks* (Colorado Springs: Navpress) 2010, p. 115.

Application: Three men once gave a testimony in a worship service. The first man said that his son's soccer coach used foul language. He was going to pull his son from the team, but he said, "I remembered that we are to make disciples." So, he invited the coach to lunch. The coach prayed to receive Christ as Savior and to forgive him. The change that next game was incredible! The second man to testify said, "I was a foul-mouthed soccer coach." Then one of his player's fathers introduced him to Jesus. He felt like a burden had been lifted. So, because he had an estranged son living in London, he sent an email to his son that he was coming to visit. He knew his son needed Jesus. The third man was very young. He said, "I was living in London and got an urgent note from my father." The man picked up his father and soon learned that his father wasn't dying, but wanted to share very Good News. The son accepted Christ and said, "Now I have an earthly father and a heavenly father!" That's what it means to make disciples that make disciples who obey the teachings of Jesus.

3. It's Urgent – Matthew 28:20

Exploration: Jesus doesn't want us to follow just any teachings. He said that we are to learn to obey everything. Yes, everything that Jesus commanded. How else can you know how to obey unless you study His Word. What a great opportunity to promote participation in a disciple-making class. And here's a question to the leaders of our discipleship groups – Are you just teaching the lesson or are you making disciples? There's a huge difference!

Interpretation: Jesus gave us His Word that He would be *with* us. We often want to stop right there. We love the idea of abiding daily with Jesus. We just hang out together in bliss. And the world just slips on by us, right? But there's a powerful word for us at the end of Matthew's Gospel. Yes, Jesus is with us, but it's to the "end of the age." Our age is coming to a screeching halt! It's stopping! We get one shot a life and then comes the judgement (see Heb. 9:27).

Closing (Application):

The clock is ticking. We can have Jesus' directions through His Word. If you are a follower of Jesus, then you *must* be about making disciples who can make disciples. If you do not have a personal relationship with Jesus or seriously doubt if He is with you always, then settle it once and for all. Accept Him as your Lord and Savior. Turn away (repent) of sins and publicly declare yourself as a disciple.

Invitation Hymn:

Amazing Grace / My Chains are Gone, I've Been Set Free (Newsboys)

Small Group Study Guide

“The Great Commission”

Bible Truth: Jesus answers our doubting and sends us a disciple-makers.

Issue: Lost people lose their way when dominated by doubt.

Get Started: Bring a bowl of ice cubes to class. Note how it sticks together. Break off one cube and place it on a plate. Note how fast it melts compared to the chunk. Explain that believers must stay connected to the Lord and other believers in order to last very long in faith and purpose in this world.

Context: Jesus had just been raised from the dead. Judas had taken his own life by this point. Jesus had told His disciples to meet him on a mountain in Galilee. This scripture is what happened when they met again. This study is important because it addresses doubts and also encourages believers to make not just new converts, but become lifelong followers of Jesus.

Scripture: Matthew 28:16-20: Read the entire passage through or tell it as an accurate Bible story.

Study: Engage everyone in discussion using these open-ended questions.

Head (facts): This lesson contains more teaching than action, so spend a little more time than usual helping each participant to learn the details in the story. Have them rebuild it section by section. Listen for accuracy and be kind in correction. Keep everyone on track to learn the story.

Hands (inspiration) :

- Pray for each person to be inspired by the Holy Spirit.
- How did the disciples know to go to a specific mountain in Galilee to find Jesus?
- Ask for ways that each of us worships Jesus? What are distractions that keep us from worshipping Jesus as we should? As He deserves?
- Discuss times that each person has been lost, lacking direction. How did they feel? Did they even know they were lost at least at the beginning? How did they begin to realize they couldn't find their way?
- How has each person coped with doubts in their faith? What did the Lord use to give them direction? If you do not know Jesus enough to worship Him, would you draw close to Him right now? Would you ask Him to settle doubts and give your life direction?
- Engage in a time of discussion about what it means to be a follower of Jesus. How does the Bible describe a person that is a genuine/authentic disciple of Jesus? Why is

the relationship more important than observing a bunch of impersonal rules? Who do you know that needs Jesus in their life? (*Go with them to share the Gospel!*)

- Baptism is described as the first act of obedience for a follower of Jesus. Have you been baptized? Why do you think baptism is often described as an “outward sign of an inward experience”?
- Introduce the Memory Verse printed below. Help them learn it. Ask about the importance of the Holy Spirit and what it means to be an empowered witness.
- How is it possible for Jesus to be with every believer? (*indwelling of the Holy Spirit upon spiritual rebirth*)
- Ask the group to identify pockets of lost people or underreached people that might be of the same kinship including immigrants, geographical groupings including multihousing and college dorms, and interest groups such as bikers or cowboys.
- If our age is supposed to end one day as Jesus said, what hope and urgency does this bring to how and when you make disciples?

Hands (application):

- How do you handle doubts? Are you struggling with doubts of faith right now?
- Will you surrender to having a personal, obedient, and lifelone relationship with Jesus? (*Arrange to meet with you at a later time to discuss their decision.*)
- Ask for volunteers to describe how they will take steps this week to go and make disciples of people groups defined by kinship, geography, or interest.
- Ask the class to partner up—men with men and women with women. Have them identify five each that they know needs the Gospel. Have them identify another five people that they need to pray for that also need a relationship with Jesus. Ask them to schedule a time in the coming week when they will go visit those who need salvation. (*Take note, follow-up and hold them accountable!*)

Close in prayer for boldness as faith-filled witnesses for Jesus.

Memory Verse: “But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth” (Acts 1:8 NASB).