

## Harmony of the Great Commission 5-17-20 FCC

The last few weeks we've been looking at events or themes related to this time in between the resurrection and the ascension of Christ. Each of the four gospels, in their accounts of what took place during this time, contain some information that overlaps and some that is unique to each gospel. No one gospel writer included everything that Jesus said and did- there was too much material.

*Joh 21:25 Now there are also many other things that Jesus did. Were every one of them to be written, I suppose that the world itself could not contain the books that would be written.*

So what does a writer do when there is too much material? You choose specific things and fit them together in a way that accomplishes your purpose as a writer.

*Joh 20:30 Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book;*

*Joh 20:31 but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.*

So John, as well as the other gospel writers, choose to record the works, events, and teachings that they felt, under the inspiration of the HS, would accomplish the purposes of God for their specific audience. Each of these writers had a specific audience in mind and a specific approach to communicating the story of Jesus to that audience. Matthew was a Jew and wrote to Jews and portrayed Jesus as the son of Abraham. Mark had his fellow Romans in mind and portrayed Jesus as the son of man. Luke had his fellow intellectual Greeks in mind and portrayed Jesus as the son of Adam. John wrote to Christians more broadly and proved that Jesus was the son of God. So whenever we read the gospels, keep in mind that each one has something unique to contribute to our understanding of Jesus.

Now, as we look at the material in each of the gospels that describes the time between the resurrection and the ascension, we do see that each gospel contains some version of what we call the great

commission. They don't call it that, that's our term that has been inserted as a subject heading in modern bibles and been popularized by evangelists. Usually it's the passage in Matthew that we label as the great commission, but each gospel writer records a sort of great commission in their own words. Jesus actually did speak all of these versions of the great commission, but each gospel writer recorded one version that suited their purposes under the inspiration of the HS. Matthew's version gets used so often because of how it flows- it feels so quotable. But each version of the great commission is essential to understanding our mission- each account of the great commission has something specific and significant to contribute. That's what we will explore today.

First we will look at Matthew.

*Mat 28:18 And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.*

*Mat 28:19 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, Mat 28:20 teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age."*

The command here is to make disciples. Two subordinate phrases describe that process: baptizing them and teaching them.

First, a note about discipleship- in modern Christianity the word discipleship gets used frequently to refer to the teaching of basic doctrines and practices to new believers. I'm afraid that many times that word is used, people who consider themselves to be mature Christians tune out whatever is being said, like that's not relevant to the level I'm at. The truth is that discipleship is much broader than that. It is a lifelong process. Some authors and speakers use other terms to communicate that idea in the hopes that people grasp this concept. Spiritual formation is one such term. A disciple is a learner who is in a constant state of change.

Discipleship includes baptism- Baptism is a public identification with Christ and his church. If Christ is the cornerstone of the church then baptism is the sill plate you could say.

And discipleship includes teaching, but look at what Jesus says we are to teach- he says 'teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you'. Our mission is about teaching obedience, not just teaching doctrine. If the disciples we think we made don't obey Christ, then we didn't teach them effectively- we didn't make disciples.

So that's Matthew's contribution. Next, let's look at Mark.

*Mar 16:15 And he said to them, "Go into all the world and proclaim the gospel to the whole creation.*

*Mar 16:16 Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned.*

*Mar 16:17 And these signs will accompany those who believe: in my name they will cast out demons; they will speak in new tongues;*

*Mar 16:18 they will pick up serpents with their hands; and if they drink any deadly poison, it will not hurt them; they will lay their hands on the sick, and they will recover."*

Mark's account stresses proclamation. As much as we don't feel like it some days, we do have to say something. Not just from a pulpit on Sundays, but all of us at any time should be able to summarize the gospel for anyone and be able to explain the answers to basic questions at a minimum. Just because someone lacks faith doesn't mean they lack intelligence.

Mark's version also emphasizes baptism. He's not saying that being baptized saves you, but it's relationship to salvation is important. It is a sign and symbol of God's promise of salvation that is fulfilled based on faith. Therefore, baptism is the first step of both doctrine and obedience that we teach. If you didn't hear my message on baptism and want to learn more and hear my position on it, it's on the website.

Then Mark records what Jesus said about signs. Now, I've been around when someone prayed that a demon would come out of someone else. Unfortunately I can't tell you for certain that there was

a demon in that person, and if there was, I can't tell you for certain that it came out. But that's not to say that demon's aren't real and that we shouldn't pray against them. I've been around when people have spoken combinations of syllables that I did not understand, but I can't say for certain that they were speaking in new tongues or languages. But that's not to say that this can't happen. I've never seen someone pick up a snake or drink poison- maybe in the name of science but not in the name of Christ; but that's not to say that can't happen too. But I have heard many times of sick people being prayed for and then recovering. And I've also heard, every week, or every day, of Christians facing difficult challenges of all kinds, extreme suffering, and overwhelming tasks in the name of Christ and facing them victoriously for the glory of Christ. The point of Jesus telling us that signs will accompany those who believe is to say that tangible fruit should be the evidence of our faith to a watching and doubting world. Faith without works is dead.

So that's Mark's contribution. Next let's look at Luke.

*Luk 24:45 Then he opened their minds to understand the Scriptures,*

*Luk 24:46 and said to them, "Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead,*

*Luk 24:47 and that repentance and forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem.*

*Luk 24:48 You are witnesses of these things.*

*Luk 24:49 And behold, I am sending the promise of my Father upon you. But stay in the city until you are clothed with power from on high."*

Luke focuses on proclamation of two things- repentance and forgiveness. This repentance and forgiveness are to be proclaimed specifically in the name of Jesus, proclaimed in the context of communicating the suffering and resurrection of Jesus. Luke's account reminds us that repentance and forgiveness are at the heart of our salvation. Repentance is more than a one-time act; it is a lifestyle of honesty and humility, as we acknowledge not only our sinful actions but our sinful nature. If that is real in our lives, only then can we explain

what sin is and encourage repentance without being condescending. Forgiveness is then God's immediate response to our repentance. Forgiveness is comprehensive in that the blood of Christ atones for both our sinful actions and our sinful nature. If that is real in our lives, if we live without guilt, only then we can we tell people that God forgives our sins in a way that makes them believe that it really has set us free and really can set them free. I've met many Christians who struggle with guilt and I've struggled with guilt myself. The reality is that sometimes we need reminders that we are forgiven. Some days we wallow in guilt and self-pity or self-punishment and legalism because we didn't let forgiveness soak in. So maybe it's no surprise that the gospel writer who recorded the parable of the good Samaritan was the same gospel writer to emphasize repentance and forgiveness in his version of the great commission. The heart of the matter is a heart matter.

So that's Luke's contribution. Finally let's look at John.

*Joh 20:21 Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you."*

*Joh 20:22 And when he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit."*

*Joh 20:23 If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you withhold forgiveness from any, it is withheld."*

I'm going to treat this passage out of order because it's hard to pay attention when questions about verse 23 are bombarding your mind. We read this statement in verse 23 and at first glance it sounds like we have the authority to forgive people's sins as well as the authority to withhold that forgiveness. That then implies that we have forced upon them the eternal consequences of being unforgiven of sin. But if we read it that way I'm afraid we're reading it wrongly. That reading of it does not fit with the rest of what the Bible teaches about our authority and our role as ambassadors and disciple-makers in the kingdom of God. Rather, the point that Jesus is making is all about the importance of verbal proclamation of the gospel. If you share the gospel with

someone and they accept it, then you are able to assure them that they are indeed without a doubt forgiven of all their sins. However, if you do not share the gospel with someone, you are withholding the opportunity from them to be forgiven. By not sharing the gospel, we are withholding their opportunity to be forgiven.

Now back to verse 21. If ever there was a version of the great commission that was as comprehensive as it is brief, this is it. "As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you." The key to understanding this statement is to ask the right question: how did the Father send the Son? He incarnated him. Jesus entered into human life and culture and was thoroughly involved in it. He didn't stay on the top of some high mountain and teach down on humanity. He didn't hide out in some cave and insulate himself from the corruption of humanity. He was with people, he ate with them, he stayed in their homes and he invited them to his home. He was really in the world. He worked to transform culture from the inside out, not from the outside in. But he could do that because he was not like the world. Jesus has sent us into the world in the same manner in which his father sent him into the world- to live in it, to live alongside people, but to be different at the same time, so as to initiate transformation from the inside out.

There is much more that can be said about these four versions of the great commission. But the point today is that together they form the great commission because the great commission is bigger than one commonly quoted verse. It is not only about discipleship, baptism, and teaching, but it's also about fruit, repentance, forgiveness, and imitating the approach of Christ- not as a church growth strategy but as a way of life in the world. It's not as much about tasks as it is about character. It's not about doing the work of Jesus as much as it is about being like Jesus.

Let us pray...

Closing hymn

Benediction:

Rom 15:5 May the God of endurance and encouragement grant you to live in such harmony with one another, in accord with Christ Jesus, Rom 15:6 that together you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Go in peace today.