

The Great Commission

Mark 16:14-20

The Gospel of Mark is concluding, Jesus is alive, and no one will believe it! It's a good thing this isn't baseball because three strikes and the church would be out (vv11, 13, 14). This is Mark's final irony. Believing something doesn't make it true, and praise God, *not* believing something doesn't make it untrue. Jesus rose from death, and his mercy and patience rose with him. Jesus is patient and longsuffering with individuals, the church and the entire world, and the disciples' initial unbelief does not ruin the mission. The Great Commission is what church is supposed to do and why, and Jesus assures us it won't be a failure.

What is the great commission?

A commission is an authoritative order given to someone to carry out. Jesus tells the disciples to go out and proclaim the gospel to the whole creation (v15). This is a big shift from his ministry in Israel, and the idea is that the church would not stay put in Jerusalem, but go out from there and tell *everyone* what he had done (cf. Matt. 28:19). Christianity is not acultural, but transcultural. William Carey once said "To know the will of God, we need an open Bible and an open map." They were to go everywhere there are people, and proclaim the good news that Jesus lived a sinless life, died in the place of sinners on the cross, and rose again, conquering death. This is good news, *not good advice*. The gospel is what Jesus did, not what happens to us as a consequence. People can mistake or fabricate the results in an exterior way, so the truth is crucial.

How is it accomplished?

Jesus said to proclaim the gospel. We immediately think of preaching in pulpits, which is good. The great commission goes beyond preachers; it is given to the church. In the Bible we see the gospel proclaimed in the church by ministers, but also by lay people (1 Cor. 14:23-25; Jn. 4:29-30). This is both and. We all feel inadequate and unimpressive which is exactly how it should be (1 Cor. 2:3-4). The power is in the message, not the messenger (Rom. 1:16). The church goes into all the world and declares this message, seeking the welfare of the city. This was the task of Israel even in exile; how much more it is ours in the inaugurated kingdom of Jesus (Jer. 29:7-10)? This is not a version of St. Francis' supposed saying: "Preach the gospel at all times. Use words if necessary." Words are always necessary. Love people at all times, "always ready to give an account to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you" (1 Pet. 3:15). It's just not preachers who share the gospel, nor is it everyone all time and you're a terrible Christian if you've not shared the gospel four times this week. Let's keep the gospel central in our worship service, love our neighbors, and be ready when they ask.

What will be the result?

Some will believe, and some won't, and that's okay (v16). They weren't responsible for the result: Paul planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the increase (1 Cor. 3:6). The Westminster Standards say sacraments exhibit and confer grace by faith. God uses preaching, conversations, prayers, and powerfully, baptism. We minimize its importance, but for Jesus and Paul, this is how you remember your salvation (v16; Rom. 6:3). Like Philip Henry, we should grab God's people by their baptisms. As in other transitional times in the history of God's people, signs confirmed the words of the apostles (vv17-18; 2 Cor. 12:12). We don't have lesser signs today, but greater: a complete Bible, a worldwide church, and the ongoing work of the Spirit. After commissioning the disciples, Jesus ascends into heaven and sat down at the right hand of God (v19). This is unmistakably a fulfillment of what he has been saying he would do as the Son of Man (e.g. 14:62). In Mark's brief and intense way, he tells us that Jesus took his seat at God's right hand where he reigns "until [God the Father] makes your enemies your footstool" (Ps. 110:1). The great commission isn't a great suggestion or possibility. It's the sure plan of God (Jn. 3:16-17). He began it (v20), continues it, and will finish it when the earth is as full the knowledge of him as the waters cover the sea.

NOTES FOR LITTLE SAINTS

Today's Passage: Mark 16:14-20

14 Afterward he appeared to the eleven themselves as they were reclining at table, and he rebuked them for their unbelief and hardness of heart, because they had not believed those who saw him after he had risen. 15 And he said to them, "Go into all the world and proclaim the gospel to the whole creation. 16 Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned. 17 And these signs will accompany those who believe: in my name they will cast out demons; they will speak in new tongues; 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." 19 So then the Lord Jesus, after he had spoken to them, was taken up into heaven and sat down at the right hand of God. 20 And they went out and preached everywhere, while the Lord worked with them and confirmed the message by accompanying signs.

1. Did the disciples believe Jesus had risen? How did Jesus respond (verse 14)?
2. How many people did Jesus instruct the disciples to tell about him (verse 15)?
3. Where did Jesus go when he ascended (verse 19)? Was this a good thing for the disciples, why or why not?
4. Draw a picture of Jesus meeting with the disciples and telling them the Great Commission.

Memory Verse to Recite Next Week:

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