

THE GREAT COMMISSION: A CAUSE WORTH LIVING FOR

John 20:19-23

By Andy Manning

I. INTRODUCTION

1. Everyone is looking for a cause to serve. We all want to contribute to something greater than ourselves; to make the world a better place.
2. And these days there are plenty of causes competing for your time, energy, and resources – some of them good, and some of them bad: Save the rain forest. Save the endangered species. Save the environment. PETA is working for the Ethical Treatment of Animals. The Open Society Foundation is working for unrestricted immigration. Planned Parenthood is working to make abortion free and available to all women at all stages of pregnancy. Black Lives Matter is working to put an end to the widespread police brutality against black people. The Human Rights Campaign is working for equal rights for the LGBTQ community. There is United Way, Salvation Army, Habitat for Humanity, St. Jude's hospital, the Shriners, the Disabled American Veterans, crisis pregnancy centers, battered women's shelters, the Heritage Foundation, etc.
3. With all of the causes and charities that exist, how do we decide which one to join? Which one to give our lives to? Which one to fight for?
4. This morning we are going to talk about one cause that is worth living for? One cause that you should be living for as a Christian. I'm not saying this is the only cause that you should be a part of, but this is one that is definitely worth your time and effort. It's called the Great Commission, making more and better Christians.

II. CONTEXT

1. Turn to John 20:19-23.
2. At this point in the story of Christ, Jesus has already died and risen from the grave. But the only person who has seen Him so far is Mary Magdalene. Later that evening, and the same day that Jesus rose, He appeared to the disciples.

III. TEXT: John 20:19-23

1. 19 When it was evening on that first day of the week, the disciples were gathered together with the doors locked because they feared the Jews. Jesus came, stood among them, and said to them, "Peace be with you."
 - i. The disciples are gathered together.
 - ii. The doors are locked.
 - iii. And they are afraid of the Jews. Why? The Jews just crucified Jesus, and they are afraid that the same fate awaits them.
 - iv. Then Jesus appeared in their midst. It does not tell us if Jesus walked through the wall, or just suddenly appeared. One thing is certain: Locked doors cannot stop Jesus.
 1. I'm sure that you have family and friends who need Christ. They are far from God. Their hearts seem like a locked door. Impenetrable. They are not open to the gospel. They don't want to talk about it. They don't want to hear about it. In fact, they get angry when you

- bring it. In high school they give out an award called “The Most Likely to Succeed.” We all have friends who are the most unlikely to convert.
2. Remember this: Locked doors cannot stop Jesus. You just keep witnessing, keep loving, keep setting an example, keep praying, and God can save the worst sinner. He can unlock the hardest heart.
- v. Jesus said, “Peace be with you.”
 1. This was the standard Hebrew greeting.
 2. In Hebrew, it was shalom.
 3. It does not mean merely, “May you be saved from trouble, but May God give you every good thing.”
 4. Christ came to give us peace. What kind of peace? Peace with God. Because of our sin, we are separated from God. We don’t have a relationship with God. We can’t. We are too sinful. But Christ came to earth to die for our sins, satisfying God’s anger against us. Now, through faith in Christ, we can be forgiven and be reconciled to God. We can have peace with God.
 5. The peace which Christ offers us is the assurance that we have forgiveness and eternal life through His name.
 6. This is the good news that God has charged us to take to the world. Peace with God. Reconciliation with God. We are all sinners, and because of sin you are separated from God and on your way to an eternity in hell. But God still loves you, and He sent His son to pay for your sins. If you believe in Him, God will forgive you and take you back, and give you eternal life.
 2. 20 Having said this, he showed them his hands and his side. So the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord.
 - i. According to the gospel of Luke, the disciples thought they were seeing a ghost. They did not yet believe that Jesus had physically risen from the grave.
 - ii. Not only did He show them his wounds, but He invited them to touch Him, and then He ate a meal with them. He wanted to convince them of His resurrection.
 3. 21 Jesus said to them again, “Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, I also send you.”
 - i. This is the Great Commission. Christ sent His disciples to carry on His mission, as He was sent by the Father.
 - ii. Christ’s mission was to die for the sins of the world (Mk 10:45). But for people to benefit from His sacrifice, they needed to hear and believe it. This is the Great Commission He gave to His followers. Go and tell the world about me.
 - iii. The Great Commission is found in in all four gospels and the book of Acts (Mt 28:18-20; Mk 16:15; Lk 24:47; Jn 20:21; Acts 1:8).
 - iv. It is the purpose of the church. It is the cause every Christian is to live for.

4. 22 After saying this, he breathed on them and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit.
 - i. Most scholars agree that Jesus did not actually give them the Holy Spirit here. This was a symbol of what was promised and of what was to come about forty days later on the Day of Pentecost. Why?
 1. Jesus said that the Spirit would not be given until after His ascension (Jn 16:17). Paul affirmed this (Eph 4:8).
 2. Right before He ascended, Jesus told His followers to not leave Jerusalem, but to wait for the promised Spirit (Lk 24:49; Acts 1:8).
 3. We know that the Holy Spirit was received on the Day of Pentecost along with great signs and wonders).
 - ii. So, Christ was pledging, or promising, or anticipating the sending of the Holy Spirit which would occur just a few weeks after this.
5. 23 If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained."
 - i. This verse is confusing at first glance.
 - ii. Here is what we know: Only God can forgive sins. If you sin against Joe, only Joe can forgive you. If you sin against God, only God can forgive you. We never see the apostles forgiving anyone's sins in the Bible. We also know from Lk 24:33 that there were others with them, so Jesus did not say this only to the apostles, as if giving them a special authority to forgive sins. So, we know that Jesus was not giving the church the authority to forgive sins; He was not instituting the sacrament of confession or penance.
 - iii. Instead Jesus was giving His church the authority to tell people, "If you repent of your sins and believe in Jesus, you will be forgiven. If you reject Christ, then you will die in your sins."

IV. SIX FACTS ABOUT THE GREAT COMMISSION

1. The master.

- i. **John 20:21** "As the Father has sent me, I also send you."
- ii. The word "commission" means a task or matter entrusted to one as an agent for another (Merriam-Webster).
- iii. The Great Commission comes from Jesus Himself. That means it is authoritative and binding. He is our master. He is the head of the church. What He says goes.
- iv. If you claim to be a Christian, then the Great Commission is binding upon you because it was given to us by Jesus.
- v. If you say you love Jesus, then you need live for the Great Commission.
- vi. Many Christians treat the Great Commission like a great suggestion, and therefore it has become the great omission. We need to restore it to its rightful place of priority in our lives and in our church.

2. The mandate.

- i. What is the Great Commission? What have we been sent to do?
- ii. We are on the same mission as Jesus. What did Jesus come to do? To seek and save the lost (Lk 19:10). That's the Great Commission. To seek and save the lost.

- iii. How did Jesus accomplish His mission? By giving His life as a ransom for many (Mk 10:45). How do we accomplish our mission? Not by dying on the cross, but by telling the world about Jesus and inviting them to believe in Him.
- iv. The Great Commission in Matthew elaborates more on the nature of the Great Commission.
- v. **Matthew 28:18-20** “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.”
- vi. The Great Commission is to make disciples. This means making more and better Christians. Lead lost people to faith in Christ, and then help them grow to maturity.

3. The missionaries.

- i. **John 20:21** “As the Father has sent me, I also send you.”
- ii. Who is “you” that Christ has sent to fulfill the Great Commission? Was it just the apostles? Of course not. If so, the Great Commission would have ended in the first century when all of the apostles died.
- iii. Is the Great Commission just for clergy, such as pastors? No. There is no reason to believe that.
- iv. All Christians are called to fulfill the Great Commission. This is a cause for all followers of Jesus. All Christians are missionaries, commissioned by Jesus Christ to make disciples.

4. The mindset.

- i. **John 20:21** “As the Father has sent me, I also send you.”
- ii. Not only are we to adopt Christ’s mission, but we are to adopt His mindset. His attitude. He modeled the mission and the character we are to have.
- iii. What was Christ’s character as He served the Lord? In a nutshell, obedience and dependence.
- iv. Obedience:
 1. **John 8:38** “For I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will, but the will of him who sent me.”
 2. As missionaries of Jesus Christ, we must devote ourselves to obeying His commands. We must not only tell people about Jesus, but show them Jesus through our lives.
 3. We must not only do God’s work, but do it God’s way.
 4. This means we must be devoted to reading and studying and learning God’s word, for that is where we find God’s will.
- v. Dependence:
 1. **Hebrews 5:7** “During his earthly life, he offered prayers and appeals with loud cries and tears to the one who was able to save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverence.”

2. Christ was devoted to prayer. He spent much time in conversation with His heavenly Father.
3. As missionaries, we must be devoted to prayer. Only through prayer will we find the energy and inspiration that we need. Only through prayer will God open eyes and hearts to respond to the gospel. Only through prayer will we have the courage and boldness we need. Only through prayer will God give us the opportunities to witness.

5. The means.

- i. **John 20:22** After saying this, he breathed on them and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit."
- ii. The only way to carry out God's mission is through the power of the indwelling Holy Spirit. Jesus promised to give the Holy Spirit to the disciples after His ascension, and the promise was fulfilled on the Day of Pentecost.
- iii. The Holy Spirit's purpose is to empower us for witnessing.
- iv. **Acts 1:8** "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."
- v. The moment you become a Christian, the Holy Spirit indwells you. He takes up permanent residence. And He will never leave you. But just possessing the Holy Spirit does not mean that you are empowered by the Spirit. And that's what we need for effective missions. We must be Spirit-empowered, or Spirit-filled.
- vi. How can we receive the filling of the Holy Spirit? Complete surrender of your life to Jesus Christ. When we sin, we grieve and quench the Spirit. To return to the Spirit-filled life, we must turn from all sin and completely surrender to Jesus Christ.

6. The motive.

- i. **John 20:23** "If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained."
- ii. Do you remember what this verse means? It means that Christ has given us the authority to proclaim that those who repent and believe in Jesus will be forgiven, and those who reject Christ will not be forgiven.
- iii. Our motive for fulfilling the Great Commission is that people would be forgiven. Without forgiveness through faith in Christ, people will die in their sins and spend eternity in hell. If they put their faith in Christ, then they will be forgiven and receive eternal life.
- iv. Our motive is eternity.
- v. Our motive is salvation (not ours, but the world's).
- vi. In his book *Radical Reformation*, Mark Driscoll says that Christ accomplished four things which people long for:
 1. Jesus takes away the sins that separate us from God so that we can be connected to God, which fulfills our spiritual longings.

2. Jesus takes away the sins that separate us from each other so that we can be reconciled to each other as the church, which fulfills our social longings.
 3. Jesus forgives the sins we have committed, thereby cleansing us of our filth, which fills our emotional longing for forgiveness.
 4. Jesus cleanses us of the defilement that has come upon us through the sins of others, which fulfills our psychological longing for healing, cleansing, and new life.
- vii. When someone gets saved, they change from the inside out. They become a radically new person. And everything about them changes.
- viii. This is why the Great Commission is the greatest cause on earth.
1. It is the most important.
 2. It is the most consequential.
 3. It is the most urgent.
 4. It is the most fulfilling.

V. THE GREATEST OPPORTUNITY: OUR CHILDREN AND GRANDCHILDREN

1. Now let's get into some specifics about how to fulfill the Great Commission.
2. For most people, the greatest opportunity for making disciples is their children and grandchildren. Statistics even show that a person is most likely to become a Christian when they are a kid living at home with their parents. The chances of conversion dramatically decrease into their twenties, and then it becomes very rare after thirty.
3. So, let's talk about how to reach our children and grandchildren for Christ.
- 4. A Strategy for Discipling Your Kids and Grandkids**
 - i. Set a clear goal. To see your kids committed to church after high school. The goal is not to bring your kids to church, or to get them baptized, or even that they say they are saved. The goal is to lead them to be life-time followers of Jesus Christ, and the most visible indicator of that is church commitment.
 - ii. Be a godly example. You need to be an example of the kind of Christian you want your kids to be when they grow up. Do you want them to love Jesus? Then you need to love Jesus. Do you want them to make church a priority? To tithe? To read their Bible and pray? To be holy? Then you need to do those things. You cannot pass on what you do not possess. If you don't have the disease, then you can't spread it.
 - iii. Get them involved in church. I can't stress this enough. If you want your kids to be committed to church after high school, then it is not enough to bring them on Sundays. Get them in Home Group. Get them volunteering. And get them tithing. They need to see that church is not an activity, it is an identity. Christians don't go to church, they are the church.
 - iv. Help them build relationships at church. Again, it is not enough for your kids to just attend on Sundays. For them to stick with the church, the church needs to become like family. That's another reason for Home Groups and volunteering and church fun events. If your kids don't have

close connections with the body of Christ, then they will drop out as soon as they can. Help them to build deep friendships with others in the church.

- v. Teach them at home. There is no way for your kids to learn all they need about Christ at church, and in a large group setting.
 1. Several times a week, sit down with them for prayer and Bible reading together. Just take one chapter a night. Start with the New Testament. Read it and do your best to explain it and to answer their questions. And when they have questions that you don't know, then tell them you will do some research and get back to them the next day. This home discipleship needs to start when they are very little. Start by reading Bible stories to them, and eventually you will be able to read the Bible with them.
 2. I also recommend that catechize your children. A catechism is a group of questions and answers that covers the main doctrines of the Bible in a memorable format. I have written a catechism that you can purchase on Kindle at Amazon.com, called the *Home Discipleship Catechism*. I've been using it with my kids for years. It has 51 questions and answers, and my kids have them all memorized, and we still review it several times a week.
5. If we can reach our kids, then we can reach the world for Christ. If we can't even reach our own kids, then we have failed.

VI. CONCLUSION

1. Recently I was reading the news and I came across an interesting story. The headline read: "WA School Officials Reprimand 2nd Grader and Search Her Backpack After She Shared Her Faith." The story went on to say that school officials repeatedly confronted and reprimanded this second-grade girl for discussing her Christian faith with her classmates. On multiple occasions she was sent to the principle's office for sharing her faith on the playground and handing out religious tracts.
2. Now, there are a number of things that are very troubling about this story. But the thing that stuck out to me was that a second-grade girl is actively sharing her faith with the lost at school. A second-grader is serving her Lord! If she can do it, then we can too. If she was willing to get in trouble for Jesus, then we should be too.
3. So, if you're looking for a cause to get behind, then look no further than the Great Commission. It's a cause worth living for.