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The Great Commission, What It Really Says

Matthew 28:18-20

Today we are going to dig into the last words of Jesus in the book of Matthew. These words are familiar, but often the significance of them is missed today.

We can look at this scripture and break it down into several parts.

The first part we see in verse 18, is that All authority is given to Jesus, second is our part, to go in all the world, then the 3rd part that we must make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, and the 4th part is to teach everything that Jesus commanded us to do, and the 5th part is a promise that He will be with us till the end of the age.

Many churches today are great at sending missionaries or going themselves. Many are pretty good at making disciples and have extensive ministries around the world. Most churches are careful to baptize new believers "in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit" The problem occurs at the next phrase "teaching them to observe everything I have commanded you". This is too often interpreted to mean "Have Bible studies with them", or provide Sunday school classes, or give them discipleship books to read and give them a workbook to plough through on their own. In many cases, churches have little to no organized plan for discipling believers or any systematic approach to ground believers in their faith. What we fail to hear are the actual words of Christ who commands us to "teach them to observe i.e. {practice, implement, follow, demonstrate} everything I have commanded you." In fact when I first started thinking about this I realized that I didn't really have any idea even what Jesus' commands really were, let alone putting them into practice. How can we possibly call Jesus Christ our Lord if we have never taken time to know what He has commanded? We cannot obey His commands if we do not even know what they are?

I am not advocating that salvation is in any way about *doing*; it's all about *being*. In other words, you cannot earn your salvation by following Christ's commands. You cannot maintain your salvation by

doing good works. And you will not lose your salvation if you refuse to follow Christ's commands. Christ's commands are meant to bring us closer to God the Father and to Himself in a bond of love.

This is important; Each time we obey Christ, we prove His Lordship, and we demonstrate our love for Him in practical and tangible ways. Jesus said to His disciples and to us,

In John 14: 15-16 "If you love Me, keep My commandments. And I will pray the Father, and He will give you another Helper that He may abide with you forever." The heart of this message is love responding to love-that's all.

Now when we look at the words of Jesus we notice that they come in different forms; some are general observations, some are warnings, some are conversations some are teachings/lessons, and some are direct commands. We should keep in mind that God does not give His people suggestions. Whatever procedes out of the mouth of the Father, the Son, or the Holy Spirit is equally important and authoritative to the Christian life, regardless of how we might want to classify it. Part of what Jesus said in John 14:10 and John 12:50 " I know that His command is eternal life. So the things that I speak, I speak just as the Father has told me" So every word that proceeds from the mouth of Christ came first from the Father above.

In this message today, we will take a brief look at 7 of Christ's commands that demonstrate His love for us.

Now, when we think of receiving a command from someone, immediately a military connotation comes to mind or a royal decree. This is not the essence or primary intent of the Word Christ used. He was not being controlling, or being a dictator, He was giving them (and us) words of life. Words like "discipline" or "command" today have taken on harsh overtones in society. Discipline, to too many people, no longer means "to guide, direct, or train." Instead, it means to punish or to impose penalties. But God's commands are not punitive but helpful in the development of godly character in our lives, and preparing us to be responsible adults. So rather than viewing Christ's commands as coming from a master to a servant, or a king to his subjects, we need to view Christ's commands as coming from a Father to His children. The relationship makes all the difference.

Christ wants us to have a healthy, vibrant relationship with His Father more than anything else. In fact, He wants us to have the same type of relationship that He has enjoyed with His Father from the beginning. Christ's commands regarding worship, relationship with God, and knowing God, emanate from His passion for us to know God in all His glory. To experience the fullness of who God is, however we must meet certain requirements. God does not have to meet our expectations, or our desires. We are the creation; He is the creator. So we must follow His expectations, meet His standards, and obey His instructions in order to know Him, serve Him, worship Him, and demonstrate our love for Him.

Christ helps us understand through His commands what is expected of us, how we approach our Heavenly Father, and what to expect when we are in His presence. The commands of Christ regarding coming to His Father, will prevent us from being defiant, offensive, or proud as we enter His presence.

Now there are actually over 50 commands that Jesus gives us in the New Testament and today I would like to take you through seven of them. And as we look at these commands I want to urge you to ask yourself “do I live this way?”

1)The first of Jesus’ commands I want to look at, is the command to REPENT:

--(Mark 1: 14-15) "After John was arrested, Jesus went to Galilee, preaching the good news of God: "The time is fulfilled, and the Kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe in the good news"

Christ's first command calls for repentance. Repentance is an admission of our faults and a recognition of God's holiness. It accepts that God's plans for His creation are righteous, just, and perfect; and our own ways are corrupt, self-centered, and will end in destruction. God's holiness and our sin are incompatible; cannot exist together. True repentance brings us back in perfect relation with our Creator. The question is: Have we truly repented and turned away from our sins?

Ask yourself: Have I allowed Christ to have authority in my life?

2) Second, Jesus commands us to COME AS A CHILD:

(Matthew: 18:2-3) says: Then Jesus called a little child to Him, set him in the midst of them and said, "Assuredly I say to you, unless you are converted and become as little children, you will by no means enter the Kingdom of heaven."

Children can accept things by faith and simply trust God. Children are willing to give others the benefit of the doubt. To a child, love is not complicated, and neither is God's love. We simply have to love Him back. God asks us to come simply to Him, to trust Him, and to let Him guide us as a gracious loving Father guides a child. There is never a time when He does not want what is best for you, nor is there ever a time when His love is withheld from you.

Ask yourself, how is my childlike faith doing? Do I trust God for my provision and protection, or do I take care of most of these things myself?

3) Third, Jesus tells us to LOVE GOD WITH ALL OUR BEING:

Because I am going through these in order as they appear in the bible, does not mean that each command is in a descending order, actually, this third command is the greatest command of all and probably is the best known.

In (Matthew 22: 37-40) Jesus answered the lawyer about the Greatest Commandment, and said; "Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength." This is the Greatest and most important Commandment. The second is like it, "love your neighbour as yourself." All the Law and the prophets depend on these two commands." This is foundational.

When we love someone, pleasing that person becomes our priority. Notice the command was not to fear, sacrifice, worship, serve, work hard for praise, or give sacrificially; it was to LOVE. It is instructive to us to realize that the "Greatest" of all commands found in the Old and New Testament directs us to LOVE. God desires relationship and our love. Christ knows that for us to strive to love God -before anything or anyone else -will keep our priorities in the right place. Once we put first things first in our life, the other things follow in order. Only a God of love would require love in return.

In one of my desperate moments, as I directed my pain and question to Him, I received an answer that gave me the direction to go, as well as another question that has brought me to this place where I examine myself in relation to my God and what is important in my life. This was a turning point in my life and I thank God for His mercy and direction. Since then I have also experienced several times when I have been set free from dark thoughts and depression and rage. My God is a caring and merciful God and I do love Him. In all our pain, with Gisela's serious affliction, and the anxiety it brings, I have learned to trust God no matter what comes, because I know He is in control and I have nothing to fear.

So Have you fallen in love with God? Has He captured your heart?

4) Fourth Jesus commands us to RECEIVE THE HOLY SPIRIT:

(Acts 1: 4-5) "While He was together with them, (His disciples) He commanded them not to leave Jerusalem, but to wait for the Father's promise. 'This,' He said, 'is what you heard from Me; for John baptized with water but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now.'"

Everyone who accepts Jesus Christ also accepts the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is to us today as Christ was to the disciples. Christ sent them out in His power to accomplish His will. He taught them truths about the Kingdom of God and served as their Model and Guide, navigating their way through difficult situations. This is the role of the Holy Spirit for us today. He also reveals truth to us: Jesus said in John 16:13 "When the Spirit of truth comes, He will guide you into all truth. For He will not speak on His own, but He will speak whatever He hears. He will also declare to you what is to come."

So in a real sense the Holy Spirit continues what Christ started. His ministry is Christ's ministry among us. Our relationship with the Holy Spirit is greatly dependent on our willingness to allow Him control and influence over our hearts, minds, and actions. As we obey the will of God, as revealed to us by the Spirit, our relationship with the Spirit is deepened and enriched. As we disobey what we understand God's will to be for us, or ignore the Spirit's promptings, we strain our relationship with the Spirit, or "grieve" the Spirit of God.

When the Holy Spirit is in control and expressed through our lives, we display more of His fruit, the character of Christ.

So ask yourself: Am I growing in love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self control?

5) Fifth, Jesus says we must ENTER THROUGH THE NARROW DOOR:

(Matthew 7: 13-14) says, "Enter through the narrow gate. For the gate is wide and the road is broad that leads to destruction, and there are many who go through it. How narrow is the gate and difficult the road that leads to life and few find it"

Christ gives us a road map, the way to eternal life the answer to life's questions, the solution to all the questions mankind has been seeking all along; yet so many choose the other way, the broad way. Instead of everlasting life they choose everlasting misery. The parameters or boundaries for the narrow way are set by the Father's will and Christ's example. Christ defines the narrow way and the broad road. He knows the difference and leads His followers along the road to righteousness and away from the road that leads to destruction. There are no alternative routes.

And Jesus demonstrated this kind of life for us. Christ did not do anything apart from the empowering guidance of His Father, nor did He say anything apart from what the Father gave Him to say. Jesus did not seek to do His own will, and His life was given in order to bring glory to His Father. Essentially at no time did Christ ever work independently from His Father.

In (John 13: 15-16) and in (John 12:26) Jesus after washing His disciples feet says "If anyone serves Me, he must follow Me. Where I am, there My servant will be also. If anyone serves Me, the Father will honour him." All of what Christ did was an example of the type of relationship we need to have with our heavenly Father. The road Christ walked was indeed narrow; it led to a cross. But after the cross was glory. So too, when our days are ended on the earth, we have the promised reward for our love and obedience waiting in glory. Christ alone, through His Spirit, will guide each and every follower to know the narrow road that leads to life. This is why making our personal relationship with Christ is so incredibly important. Without that growing, vibrant, personal relationship with the Spirit of

God and our Lord Jesus Christ, we are in serious jeopardy of getting off track as we walk through life. The only way believers are able to enter the narrow gate is to seek and search for the Lord Jesus Christ. The call to "follow Me" continues to this day. We are to follow no man, no religious leader, no author, no mentor or hero of the faith through that narrow gate; only Christ knows, truly knows the way, because only Christ truly knows our hearts.

In (John 14:6) Jesus told him "I am the way the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me"

The narrow gate does not represent simply living a healthy lifestyle or abstaining from harmful activities; it represents salvation itself. Those who choose and remain on the narrow way will be saved; those who choose the broad way will not enter heaven. When Christ pointed out the existence of the narrow gate, He was in effect pointing to Himself.

My question today is;

Are we really seeking the Lord with all our heart?
Have we been substituting religious activity for our love of God?

You may want to stop and consider repenting before your Lord, asking Him to forgive you and restore you onto the paths of righteousness.

6) Sixth Jesus commands us to WORSHIP IN SPIRIT AND IN TRUTH:

(John 4: 24) says "God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth"

Worship is giving God what He deserves and what He wants from us. We do not determine the requirements for approaching God; He does. God is not our servant and we cannot demand action or blessing from God as if we determine what He should do. Not just anyone is allowed into the presence of God. He sets the standards, He determines the requirements, and He makes the rules for what is acceptable worship.

To worship God "in the spirit" requires that our spirit must be made alive by His Spirit. We must be born again, revived spiritually, and enabled by Him to come into His presence in the first place. To

worship God in spirit also means that our spirits are responding to the Holy Spirit. We should be able to sense that He is praying with us, prompting us, inhabiting our praise, convicting us, and glorifying God in and through us.

To worship Him in truth is to see ourselves as He sees us, to let His Spirit reveal to us who we are in the sight of God, and agree with Him. God desires real worship. Real worship is not always polished and pretty. Sometimes it includes pain and brokenness and raw emotion. When we truly empty ourselves of our pride, arrogance, and self-sufficiency, confessing our sins with acts of repentance, we are then able to worship God in truth and with all our spirit.

I have a couple questions now that I hope will help us answer whether we are worshipping in spirit and truth. Ask yourself:

When was the last time I asked God what He wanted from me in worship?

Do I need to ask forgiveness from someone I have offended before I worship? Do that!

Let nothing hinder your worship, or it will not be worship; it will simply be religious activity that is not worth your time or God's.

7) Seventh, Jesus says we must ABIDE IN Him:

(John 15: 4) says, "Remain in Me, and I in you. Just as a branch is unable to produce fruit by itself unless it remains [grafted to] in the vine, so neither can you unless you remain in Me"

(John 15:9) "As the Father has loved Me, I have also loved you. Remain in My love."

This command identifies the place where our lives and souls must make their home as a follower of Christ. Abide means "to live, to exist, to thrive, to function, and to stand." More than knowing *about* God's love or simply *appreciating* God's love, we must let Christ's love guide us, control us, and compel us to act and plan according to His desire. When we abide in the love of Christ, we are continually conscious of His presence, protection, guidance, blessing, discernment, and passion for

those around us. In fact, it is impossible to appreciate fully the scope and depth of the love of Christ in solitude; it is something that is best expressed with others, with His other family members. When we are "in Christ", we are describing our state of mind, our circumstances, and the location of our soul all at once. When we are "in Christ," it does not matter if we are in some other physical location, in school, or in trouble, our spiritual state supersedes everything, this is how martyrs could face blazing fires, having lions devour them, torturous imprisonment or imminent drowning, with peace, because they knew they were "in Christ" already. So ask yourself

Do I know what most often replaces Christ as my top priority? Am I intentionally developing my love relationship with God? Unless we are conscious of the things that would compromise our affections toward our Lord, we will not be prepared to subdue them and reject them when they tempt us away from God.

Sometimes we think we are being dutiful, creative, and fervent in carrying out our responsibilities when in fact, we have gone far beyond Christ's agenda for us. He does not ask for our help or our suggestions or our opinions. He simply asks for our obedience and our co-operation with His will. His priorities need to be our priorities. His ways need to be our ways. His will must become our mandate.

So let us recap what we learned today as we looked at being obedient to some of Jesus' last words to His disciples "teach them to obey everything I have commanded you.": The first command is to repent, the second is to come to God like a child, the third is to love God and our neighbour, the fourth is to receive the Holy Spirit, the fifth is to enter through the narrow door, the sixth is to worship in spirit and in truth, and the seventh is to abide in Him,

As you can see, the main thrust of Jesus' commands is to have a close and intimate love relationship with God the Father, and the Son and the Holy Spirit, and by developing this relationship we get to know that we can trust Him, that He wants the best for us, that His ways are sometimes beyond our understanding, but He is always looking out for our well being on the spiritual as well as physical level.

I urge you brothers and sisters become familiar with Jesus' commands and strive to implement them in your life. I also would like to start a study group to learn all of what Jesus commanded so we can truly be Christ's followers.

Let us pray:

Lord Jesus we are gathered here to worship You and seek to know Your will better. As we learn more of what You have commanded us, we realize our lack of knowledge and our need of Your guidance in our lives, corporately as well as individually. We ask for Your forgiveness for the negative and unloving thoughts, for our stubborn self-sufficiency, self-righteousness, carelessness and religiosity. Help us, Jesus, to love more, to turn away from self, and to pickup our cross and follow You. Lord quicken Your Holy Spirit within us and give us a measure of Your joy and peace, so we may serve You in spirit and in truth. Amen