

## GREAT COMMISSION

In the 1940s a guy by the name of Lawrence Wahlstrom purchased an old bombsight and took it apart to see what made it work. As he began to put it back together, he decided to add some spare parts which he had from other projects. Over time, friends and neighbors took an interest in his project and started bringing him parts and pieces, which he incorporated into his contraption. Over a period of about ten years, he added to his machine hundreds of wheels and cogs, belts and whistles and gears and who knows what all until the thing became "a marvel to behold." He would throw the switch, and the machine's thousand parts would begin to move. Wheels turned, lights flashed, bells rang, and belts whirred. The device came to be known as "Wahlstrom's Wonder." It was incredible. People would come from all over to see it. It sits in a museum today. As amazing as that contraption appears, the reality is that it does not do anything. It looks impressive, but it serves no purpose. It is a 'do nothing' machine. Lots of motion and movement, but with no purpose.

What is the purpose of the church? If you were to come to this church during the week while camps were on you would see that there is a lot of stuff going on. There are kids running around, and staff chasing them. There is lights and sound and movement, but what is it's purpose. What is our purpose as a church? What is our function? Today we are continuing our series on Counter Cultural Living and I want to talk about what our mission is as a church. We are different then the world around us because we have a different purpose and mission.

Matthew 28:18 Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. 19 Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, 20 and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."

Jesus told us to go and reach the nations for Him. To accomplish such a huge task Jesus has given us 3 things to aid us in proclaiming His message until He returns:

### 1. We Have His Permission (vs. 18) - authority

In verse 18 Jesus says "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me." The one who is telling us to go is the one who also has the authority to do so. What is the difference between house sitting and breaking and entering? Permission. If the home owner has given you permission to enter their home and feed the cat and water the pants then doing so is not a problem. You do not have to worry or look over your shoulder as you take the key that was given you and put it into the lock. However, if you do not have permission to enter the home, doing so is a crime.

Jesus said that all authority or EXOUSIA had been given to him. The word comes from the root which means "lawful" or "allowed". God created this world. All things belong to Him because all things were created by and for Him.

Col 1:16 For by him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by him and for him.

The earth and everything in it belongs to Jesus and He has given us the command to go. He alone has the authority to say this. Only the owner of a property can give directions on what to do with it.

Eph 1:19 That power is like the working of his mighty strength, 20 which he exerted in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms, 21 far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every title that can be given, not only in the present age but also in the one to come. 22 And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church

Only the owner of the home can tell you what to do with it. We are getting ready to sell our house right now. If I wanted to rip out a wall or change the flooring, I could do so because I am the owner of the property. If I was just renting the place I could not do these things, I would first need special permission from the owner. If someone told you to take a hammer and knock a big hole in the side of the church would you do it? I hope not! However, if it is part of the building project and you are told to do it by the leadership of the church to do it then it would be fine. Only the one with authority can give authority to another.

Just after Naomi and I were married I was working as a youth pastor at Philpott Memorial Church in Hamilton. Naomi was still taking classes at Tyndale at the time. One Sunday morning she was sitting in my office finishing a paper while I was teaching a class. One of the senior's walked by and asked "Does Pastor Steve know that you are in his office?" Naomi just looked up and nodded yes. The lady continued, "I do not think the youth pastor would be very happy to find out that one of the youth was using his computer without his permission!" She smiled and introduced herself as my wife, which ended the conversation. Naomi had every right to be in that office using my computer. What is mine is hers.

Jesus has told us to go. Since the nations belong to Him than there is nothing in all creation that should stop us from moving forward. It does not depend on laws or prevailing attitudes. His command is not based on culture or political correctness – it depends on God.

Before coming to Bramalea Baptist I was pastoring a Mennonite church in Leamington. When the Mennonite church was founded by Menno Simons back in the 1500s it was one of the greatest evangelistic movements of the protestant reformation. Gradually, due to persecution, it lost it's evangelistic passion. As the Mennonite refugees moved from country to country different rulers would invite them to settle in their lands with the clear understanding that they were not allowed to share their faith. From the 17<sup>th</sup> century onward evangelism was almost completely extinguished from Mennonite groups. The church turned inward to protect itself and isolated itself from the outside world. This fear still remains. The early Mennonites compromised their faith to survive and in many ways they are still compromising today. The tendency to isolate instead of infiltrate is still there.

When we lived in Kuwait, we would do everything we could to win Muslims for Christ, even though it was illegal to do so. There were other churches in the gulf that had decided that they would not witness to muslims in order to comply with the government. Churches that are born in compromise eventually die in compromise.

Jesus has told us "You have my permission." We do not have to fear what man says or what they can do. We have the authority of the maker of heaven and earth to speak the truth. Even in today's world where everything is about 'tolerance' we cannot be silent. We are living in a time when religious freedoms are being eroded and speaking the truth and calling sin what it is can lead to persecution. We dare not hold back out of fear.

Just a short time after Jesus had been crucified, Peter and John went to the temple and healed a lame man. They were arrested and were threatened. Notice how they responded;

Act 4:18-20 Then they called them in again and commanded them not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus. 19 But Peter and John replied, "Judge for yourselves whether it is right in God's sight to obey you rather than God. 20 For we cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard."

They went back and reported to the believers what had happened and then prayed;

Act 4:29-31 Now, Lord, consider their threats and enable your servants to speak your word with great boldness. 30 Stretch out your hand to heal and perform miraculous signs and wonders through the name of your holy servant Jesus." 31 After they prayed, the place where they were meeting was shaken. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God boldly.

There is an enormous gap between what we think we can do and what God calls us to do. Our ideas of what we can do or want to do are trivial; God's ideas for us are grand. -- Eugene H. Peterson

When we step out in faith believing that we have the authority of Christ and declare the word of God boldly it makes an impact. Walking forward in the authority of God leads to a display of the power of God. We need to take the authority that we have been given and move forward.

## 2. We Have His Purpose (vs. 19-20a) – Word of God

Jesus has given us permission to go into all the world. So what is it that He expects us to do as we go? We are told to "make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you."

We are commanded to go and make disciples of all nations. That is our purpose. This involves more than just sharing the good news. This means teaching and training people. It means equipping people for service. Jesus not only gives us permission, He gives us purpose. We have a mission. We are to take the Word of God that we have been given and share it with others. Making disciples means duplicating yourself in the life of another person.

2 Timothy 2:1 You then, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. 2 And the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable men who will also be qualified to teach others.

Discipleship is not just a class or an event – something that happens once and then you are finished. It is a process that begins when we receive Christ into our lives and ends when we go to be with Him forever. Jesus says here that the first step of discipleship is baptism. Baptism is more than just a suggestion. As a step of obedience it is an essential part of our spiritual development.

Baptism is not an end, it is just a beginning. Then comes teaching. To be discipled means that we become students and seek to learn the things of God. This involves more than education – it means transformation. It means that we become more and more like Jesus.

General William Booth, of the Salvation Army, once told his students, "If I had my choice, I wouldn't send you to school, I'd send you to Hell for five minutes, and you'd come back real soul winners."

Eph 4:15 Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ.

To be transformed by the help of the Spirit so that our lives are made by Spiritual fruit is a process. Godly character starts in godly thinking. As we fill our minds with Christ through the Bible our actions begin to change. These actions when repeated over time become habits.

Sow a thought, reap an act. Sow an act, reap a habit. Sow a habit, reap a character. Sow a character, reap a destiny. -- George Munzing

A little dog was hit by a car and was lying by the side of the road. A doctor was driving by and saw the injured dog. He stopped, picked up the dog and took it home with him. There he found that the dog had only been stunned, and that it would be OK except for some minor cuts and abrasions. He revived the dog, cleaned up the wounds and was carrying the dog back out to his car to take it home when the dog jumped out of his arms and ran off. "What an ungrateful little dog" the doctor thought. That night he heard a scratching at the door. He opened the door to find the little dog he had treated along with another hurt dog.

### 3. We Have His Power (vs. 20b) – Holy Spirit

Jesus ends saying, "and surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age." We are not told to just go in our own strength. As we go out with the permission and purpose of Jesus then He goes out with us through the Holy Spirit. The encouragement of His presence and His power go out with us. God never sends without first equipping. When Jesus sent out his disciples He gave them the authority and power to do the same things that He was doing:

Luke 9:1 When Jesus had called the Twelve together, he gave them power and authority to drive out all demons and to cure diseases, 2 and he sent them out to preach the kingdom of God and to heal the sick.

When Jesus was taken up into heaven he reassured them that He would continue to be with them through the Holy Spirit:

Acts 1:8 But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.

We were never meant to live the Christian life in our own power. It is impossible. That is why we were given the Holy Spirit to assist us. God designed us to be plugged in to His power source.

We see this in the early church. This small band of outcasts went out and changed the world forever. Their ministry was marked by power. Paul was able to testify that it was by the power and presence of Jesus that he was able to preach the Gospel across the Roman world:

Rom 15:17 Therefore I glory in Christ Jesus in my service to God. 18 I will not venture to speak of anything except what Christ has accomplished through me in leading the Gentiles to obey God by what I have said and done -- 19 by the power of signs and miracles, through the power of the Spirit. So from Jerusalem all the way around to Illyricum, I have fully proclaimed the gospel of Christ.

Like Paul, we have received the Holy Spirit and we go forth in the presence and power of Christ. As Christians we have been commissioned with the task of making Jesus known to this nation in which we live. There is no way we can do that without God's help. We see in the Bible that this task will someday be completed:

Mt 24:14 And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come.

Rev 7:9-10 After this I looked and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb.

The Great Commission is a "finishable" task. There are many things in the Bible which are not "finishable". Jesus said to bless the poor but he did not say to eliminate poverty - "The poor you will always have with you" (Mt 26:11) Likewise the church is called to do many things which are not finishable: bring justice, eliminating sickness & poverty, seeing every person alive come to Christ, creating a perfect church, etc. However we know that this command Jesus gives will be completed, possibly in our lifetime.

In an earlier century, there lay a large boulder in the middle of the roadway. Traveler after traveler walked past the boulder, veering off the side of the road to get around it. All the while, they were shaking their head and muttering, "Can you believe that? Someone should get that big thing out of the way. What an inconvenience!" Finally, a man came along and, seeing the boulder, took a branch from a tree and pried the boulder enough to get it rolling and rolled it off to the side of the road. Lying underneath the rock, he found a small bag with a note. The man picked up the note and read it. It read as follows:

"Thank you for being a true servant of the kingdom. Many have passed this way and complained because of the state of the problem and spoken of what ought to be done. But you have taken the responsibility upon yourself to serve the kingdom instead. You are the type of citizen we need more of in this kingdom. Please accept this bag of gold that traveler after traveler have walked by simply because they didn't care enough about the kingdom to serve." I wonder what "bags of gold" we're missing each day, simply because we don't bother to get involved in serving our heavenly kingdom. Are we the type of heavenly citizens our Father needs more of?