

# Understanding the Great Commission

## Matthew 28:16-20

*Then the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had told them to go. When they saw him, they worshiped him; but some doubted. Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore, make disciples of all nations, baptizing 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. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."*

About all of us have heard the term, "THE GREAT COMMISSION." It has to do with a direct commandment from Jesus to "go and make disciples

When we look at the early church we see boldness, clarity, and power. We see a dynamic faith that impacts individuals, communities, and nations. We see a gospel that transforms and we long for that same power and presence in our churches today.

### **So, what did the early church do and how did they understand the Great Commission?**

As I look at the biblical account and the accounts of their acts in the pages of recorded history, I can identify four major components. These are not new to us, nor are they completely ignored today, however, for the most part they are grossly underdeveloped in the lives of Christians today and in most of our churches. In fact, I would go as far as to say, in many places, these areas are no longer a driving force for ministry.

It is my conviction that without a clear understanding of what Jesus meant in the Great Commission and without reclaiming these four basic components of the gospel, we will continue to struggle and decline. Indeed, when the church fails to faithfully walk in the Great Commission it becomes IRRELEVANT to the culture.

So, what are these four basic components to the Great Commission? They are:

1. EVANGELISM
2. DISCIPLESHIP
3. HEALING
4. CASTING OUT THE DEMONIC

Two recent conversations helped me crystallize these for me. I met an African Bishop from the Diocese of Jos in Northern Nigeria, Bishop Ben Kwashi. This vibrant and humble man said to me, "Alan, if you **can not** evangelize, heal the sick, cast our devils and disciple you simple can not minister in my dioceses." He further said, "I no longer send my clergy to England to be trained. They come back **learned but useless.**" Bishop Ben went on to explain that ministry without power is irrelevant in his country

The second conversation I had was with a very prominent clergy person here in the United States. He shared with me that he three (that's THREE) earned PhD's in theology; was tremendously educated and learned in the faith and thoroughly orthodox in his belief. Sadly, he acknowledged that even with all his learning he lacked any confidence or experience in the four components above.

As I look at the landscape of the church today, we face a very real crisis. In essence we have lost the ability to actually "do" the Great Commission. There are pockets of health and some bright lights around the church, but for the most part, as a whole, the numbers do not lie. It is painfully obvious; our decline and irrelevance speak volumes. The question is, how do we recover and reclaim these basic four components and once again fulfill the Great Commission?

When Jesus called the twelve, He simply said, "Follow me." Peter left the nets, Matthew left his tax booth, and the others laid aside their earthly vocation to become "fishers of men." Jesus asked them to watch, listen, and learn. His pattern of ministry is summarized by

Matthew in Chapter 9:35-37:

***Jesus went through all the towns and villages, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the good news of the kingdom and healing every disease and sickness. When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. Then he said to his disciples, "The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field."***

Initially, they were passive while Jesus taught and ministered the kingdom of God. But that was soon to change. Eventually, He turned to the twelve and commissioned them to go out two by two. In Luke 9:1-2 we read:

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

Jesus gave them "power and authority."

Jesus told them to drive out demons.

Jesus told them to cure diseases.

Jesus sent them to preach the kingdom of God.

Jesus told them to heal the sick

My conclusion is this. Understanding the Great Commission has to do with a "proclamation" of the Kingdom of God as well as a "demonstration" of the Kingdom of God. The two are inseparable.

## Evangelism

The bible describes people as being “dead,” “lost,” “separated,” “alienated,” “under the dominion of darkness,” “hostile toward God,” “slaves to sin,” “enemies of God” and in need of the savior.

Look at these scriptures.

Ephesians 2:1-4 – dead in your trespasses and sin  
Colossians 1:13 – delivered from the dominion of darkness.

The work of Evangelism has been given to the church and is the responsibility of every believer. We are entrusted with the privilege to share God’s saving love with others. Because we have found this true in our own lives, we are credible witnesses. We all have a story to tell and are duty bound to tell it.

The gospel has four parts. One God loves us.

1. In God’s infinite love He made us for himself
2. We fell into sin and became subject to evil and death.
3. God sent His only begotten Son to live and die as one of us to reconcile us to God by stretching out His arms on the hard wood of the cross that all could come to salvation.
4. Each of us must decide individually to believe this and accept Jesus as Savior

When we tell our story there are three components:

1. What our lives were like before we came to accept Jesus as our Savior
2. What happened? How did we come to accept Jesus as our Savior?
3. What difference has it made in our lives today?

**I. As a church we must be convinced that those without Jesus are perishing,** lost, condemned, headed to destruction, will be eternally separated from God and be cast into the outer darkness. This reality must sink in. It must be acknowledged. It cannot be ignored. It is a harsh and painful reality. Not everybody goes to heaven. The door will be shut. There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

**II. As a church we must be convinced that Jesus is the only way.** He is “the way, the truth and the life” and nobody (NOBODY) comes to the Father but through Him. He is the only son of God. He is the only savior. He is the lonely Lord. He is the only means of forgiveness and eternal life.

**III. As a church we must train and equip our people to do the work of evangelism.** Yes, there are those who have been uniquely gifted by God and the Holy Spirit with a special anointing for Evangelism (like Billy Graham); however, all of us have the responsibility to effectively communicate the Gospel and seek for opportunities (as the Lord leads) to share our faith.

IV. As a church we must bring clarity and boldness to the sinful and rebellious nature of all fallen humanity (of which we are apart) and call people to respond publically. In Romans 1:8 Paul states, “for I am not ashamed of the gospel for it is the power of God unto salvation for all who believe”. The gospel is a public matter.

V. **As a church we must be willing to suffer persecution for the Gospel.** Jesus said it very simply, “if they hated me, they would hate you.” “If they persecuted me, they would persecute you.” “You will be hated by all men because of me”. Repeatedly, the apostles made it clear, that there will be a reaction to the Gospel. St. Paul wrote to Timothy, “All who follow Christ Jesus *will be persecuted.*”

**Evangelism should start at home.** Parents are to raise their children in the knowledge of the Lord and bring them to understand the message of the Gospel. Each child must ultimately respond, however, the parents are a primary influence and a critical one.

## **DISCIPLESHIP**

In our Baptismal Covenant we are asked, “Will you continue in the Apostles teaching, the fellowship, the breaking of bread and the prayers?”; and we respond, “I will with God’s help.” So, what is the “apostles teaching”?

The record of what the apostles taught and believed is contained in the New Testament. They are the dogma, doctrine and disciples believed and practiced by faithful believers throughout all the ages. They are the timeless truths of faith that have been formalized in creeds, council, articles, and liturgies.

**All Christians must be disciplined must be taught the faith.** They must be taught the basic truths of Christianity and have their mind’s renewed according to the Word of God. This requires study, practice, learning, and doing. It is a “proactive” responsibility of those who come to faith in Jesus Christ.

These are the basics that every Christian should ultimately know:

### **Basic Christian Dogma’s (Nicene Creed)**

- The Holy Trinity
- Jesus as Coeternal with the Father
- Virgin Birth
- Jesus’ Redemptive act in History
- Jesus’ death, burial and bodily resurrection
- Jesus’ place at the Fathers right hand (mediator and intercessor)
- His coming again to Judge the living and the dead.
- The role and work of the Holy Spirit – author and giver of life
- The role of Baptism and forgiveness of sin.

The one Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church  
Eternal life for all those who believe.

2 Corinthians 4 tell us to bring every thought captive to the mind of Christ.

- The renewed mind can detect deception.
- The renewed mind can detect error.
- The renewed mind can respond temptation – it is written.
- The renewed mind is the source of God’s Wisdom.
- The renewed mind is filled with godly counsel.
- The renewed mind is a shield of faith.
- The renewed mind is a light in the darkness.
- The renewed mind is salt in the earth.

Discipleship is not just information, it involves application.

## HEALING THE SICK

- John 14:12
- James 5:14-16
- Mark 16:15-18
- 1 Corinthians 2:1-6
- Acts 2:43

As a church we must:

- I. Embrace and make normal the healing ministry of the Gospel consistent with the record of the early church.
- II. This ministry must have credibility and believability at the local level.
- III. A healthy theology of healing must be developed to avoid the abuses
- IV. Maturity, Integrity and Credibility are crucial.

## CASTING OUT THE DEMONIC

In our Baptismal Covenant on page 302 in the Book of Common Prayer those being presented for Baptism are challenged to make three “renunciations”:

*Question:* Do you renounce Satan and all the spiritual forces of wickedness that rebel against God?

*Answer:* **I renounce them.**

*Question:* Do you renounce the evil powers of this world which corrupt and destroy the creatures of God?

*Answer:* **I renounce them.**

*Question:* Do you renounce all the sinful desires that draw you from the love of God?

*Answer:* **I renounce them.**

This is a very ancient liturgy and powerful liturgy of the church. These ancient renunciations go back to the earliest record of baptisms, and I want to discuss them briefly.

Ephesians 6:12

*For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age,<sup>[c]</sup> against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places.*

Ephesians 2:1-4

*As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient. All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our sinful nature<sup>l</sup> and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature objects of wrath.*

Genesis 1:26

*Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, in our likeness, and let them rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the livestock, over all the earth, and over all the creatures that move along the ground."*

This dominion was lost and actually usurped by Satan. This is made clear in

Luke 4

*The devil led him up to a high place and showed him in an instant all the kingdoms of the world. And he said to him, "I will give you all their authority and splendor, for it has been given to me, and I can give it to anyone I want to. So if you worship me, it will all be yours."*

Notice Satan says, "it has been given to me". Well, who gave it to him? That is right, Adam. You might also notice that Jesus did not dispute Satan's claim.

**Our first renunciation is toward the unseen realm, the spirit realm.**

**The second renunciation has to do with the natural realm.** Jesus made this reference in John 10:10

*The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.*

**The Third Renunciation is about our hearts**

Mark 7: 20-23

***For from within, out of men's hearts, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, greed, malice, deceit, lewdness, envy, slander, arrogance and folly. All these evils come from inside and make a man 'unclean.' "***

The things that “corrupt and destroy” are in all of our hearts.  
Exposing and casting out the demonic is at all three levels.

The church has been given authority to minister in power to break every stronghold of the evil one.

Luke 10:17-19

***The seventy-two returned with joy and said, "Lord, even the demons submit to us in your name He replied, "I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven. I have given you authority to trample on snakes and scorpions and to overcome all the power of the enemy; nothing will harm you.***

Ephesians 5:8-12

***For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light (for the fruit of the light consists in all goodness, righteousness and truth) and find out what pleases the Lord. Have nothing to do with the fruitless deeds of darkness, but rather expose them. For it is shameful even to mention what the disobedient do in secret.***

We also walk in light and expose darkness.

### The Three Levels for Ministries of Power

#### Internal or Personal Power

What Jesus had in mind was to fill us with His Holy Spirit so we could be free of our sinful nature. This is a grace-oriented endeavor. Without grace and the Holy Spirit we will continue to fall short of the new life Jesus intended for us to walk in. We simply can not be successful by will power alone. Jesus wanted us to have His power living in us so that we could become more like Him. On a personal level, the following are areas where God's power in us enables us to walk in the newness of life. Of course this is not an exhaustive list, but gives you an idea of what Jesus meant when He said, *"you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you."* Acts 1:8

- ❖ The power to repent
- ❖ The power to forgive
- ❖ The power to love your enemies
- ❖ The power overcome temptation
- ❖ The power to put off the old man
- ❖ The power to resist Satan
- ❖ The power to bear witness
- ❖ The power to pray
- ❖ The power to minister in the body of Christ
- ❖ The power to give
- ❖ The power to worship
- ❖ The power to read and study the Bible
- ❖ The power to love unconditionally
- ❖ The power to be honest
- ❖ The power to be moral
- ❖ The power to be ethical
- ❖ The power to walk with integrity
- ❖ The power to confess sin
- ❖ The power over greed
- ❖ The power over lust
- ❖ The power over hate
- ❖ The power over gossip
- ❖ The power over fear
- ❖ The power to trust God
- ❖ The power over anxiety
- ❖ The power to die to self
- ❖ The power to control the tongue
- ❖ The power to hear the Lord
- ❖ The power to wait on the Lord
- ❖ The power to discern the ways of the Lord
- ❖ The power to walk in humility
- ❖ The power to overcome pride
- ❖ The power to be a servant
- ❖ The power to prefer others over yourself
- ❖ The power to be patient
- ❖ The power to \_\_\_\_\_

#### External Power or Demonstrated Power

When Jesus walked on the earth He modeled a very clear teaching and ministry method. He would talk or teach about the Kingdom of God and then He would minister in power to demonstrate the Kingdom of God. This model is seen throughout His public ministry. He would teach about bread from heaven, then feed the 5000. He would declare He is the light of the world, then open the eyes of the blind. It was simply a basic model of 'proclamation and demonstration.'

The amazing thing is this, Jesus expected us to do the same thing and continue in this simple model. There should be 'ministry time.' This is critical because it backs up what we preach, and gives credibility to the resurrection and the truths of the gospel.

In *John 14*, Jesus told the disciples that *"the works He did they would do and even greater works than these because He was going to the Father."* The early church experienced the demonstrated and external power of God through 'signs and wonder.'

The primary demonstrations of power were healing the sick and casting out the demonic. Many times in we see healing and deliverance as central to the ministry of the church and the Kingdom of God.

Seventy percent of the public ministry of Jesus was centered on healing the sick and 100% of the time, evangelism took place. There is a direct connection between demonstrations of the good news of the gospel and kingdom growth.

The purpose of signs and wonders is to give greater credibility to the message of the gospel. Signs and wonders can be as simple as a changed life. Over and over again, as people come to faith in Jesus Christ, their lives change. Paul is a good example, one day he was persecuting the church, then, after the Road to Damascus experience, he was out preaching the Gospel of Christ.

So, healing, personal transformation, deliverance, and people being set free from all sorts of problems (marriages healed, children off drugs, financial miracles, suicide averted, addictions broken, etc.) are all external demonstrations of the power of God.

### **Eternal Power and the Age to Come**

This last area has to do with prayer, fasting and intercession. Continually, in the biblical record, we see prayer that moves something in the eternal realm. It is power. Look at **Daniel 10**. Daniel is fasting and praying for understanding. There is resistance in the unseen realm until Michael, the Archangel, is sent to battle on behalf of the angelic messenger who was delayed three weeks (21 days). Daniel's persistence in prayer, fasting and intercession was critical to getting the answer to his prayer.

God calls us to pray and to seek Him first in all things. He tends to wait on us to pray before He answers. It is central to the way God operates in the earth. **II Corinthians 10** tells us we do not war against flesh and blood (people) but against unseen powers; **Ephesians 6** tells us to put on the Armor of God to stand against the powers and principalities in the unseen realm. The power of the church is released through being in intercession for God's blessings to flow into the church.

- Do you need more people – fast and pray
- Do you need more resources – fast and pray
- Do you need wisdom – fast and pray
- Do you want success – fast and pray
- Do you want bondages and darkness broken – fast and pray

Consider **Matthew 6: 28-34**, Jesus teaches about anxiety and concern for the necessities of life. He concludes that God knows you have need of all these things, but **“SEEK FIRST THE KINGDOM OF GOD AND HIS RIGHTEOUSNESS”** – prayer. In **Matthew 7:7-11**, Jesus teaches us to **“Ask, Seek and Knock”** and in **James 4: 2-4**, James tells us we **“have not because we ask not”** and when we do ask it is from selfish motives. Again – power in prayer.

**The power of prayer, fasting and intercession is highly “underdeveloped” in most of our churches in the Western world.**