

WHAT EVERY CHRISTIAN NEEDS TO KNOW

Lesson 26

The Church: Its Purpose & Mission

INTRODUCTION

Today we begin 3 lessons on the church. They are: (1) The Church, Its Purpose & Mission; (2) next week: Water Baptism; (3) two weeks from today: The Lord's Supper.

Peter Drucker (1909-2005) during the last 50 yrs or so, was a pace setter in American business. He has been called "the man who invented management". Among other things, Drucker was paid thousands of dollars to study and advise companies. He would always ask 2 crucial questions when consulting: 1. "What business are you in?" 2. "How's business?" Now, those sound like terribly simple questions but Drucker would see many companies go under because they left their original plan and purpose. They would try to do too many things or follow rabbit trails and end up far from where they started. That simple question, "What business are you in?" would help them focus and get back on track.

How about the church of Jesus Christ? What "business" are we in? How can we keep on track and make the main thing the main thing? It is easy to get off track. Peter Drucker also pioneered the concept of a mission statement. Now, everybody has one: businesses, schools, athletic teams and churches. What is the mission statement of the church?

Jesus gave us the mission statement for His church. It has been called "The Great Commission" and is found in Matthew 28:16-20(read). Versions of the Great Commission are also found in Mark 16:15-18, Luke 24:46-48, John 17:18 & 20:21, and Acts 1:8. So, this is no isolated command.

We will approach this lesson by asking a series of questions.

1. What is a commission?

"The act of granting certain powers or the authority to carry out a particular task or duty; the matter or task so authorized; authority to act on behalf of another and in place of another." [*American Heritage College Dictionary*, page 280]

2. To whom was the Great Commission given?

Read Matthew 28:16-17

This took place after Jesus was raised from the dead. His trial, crucifixion, death, burial and resurrection had all happened in Jerusalem. Jerusalem was a hotbed of His enemies. So, Jesus had instructed His disciples to meet Him in the north, in Galilee. It says that "some were doubtful". Let's face it – they had blown it. While Jesus was on the cross all of them had abandoned Him except John. They doubted themselves; they were fearful and still a bit confused. They were ordinary individuals just like we are. However, the commission was given to them and to us. Jesus knew what He was doing. He was entrusting them and us with His mission, His message. He has no "plan B"!

3. The Person: Who gave the commission?

Read Matthew 28:18

Jesus, the Risen Christ, gave the commission. We tend to pass over this crucial point when we read the Great Commission passage. Notice where He begins: with His authority. He has all authority in heaven and on earth! No one has more authority than He does. He is the King of kings and the Lord of lords. Remember our definition of a commission: "...authority to act on behalf of another and in place of another." Philippians 2:9 says, "God highly exalted Him and has given Him a Name that is above every name." He has the authority to give the commission and the disciples (including us) go in His authority. We are on the King's errands and are about His business!

J.C. Ryle, in his *Expository Thoughts on the Gospels – Matthew*, says on this verse, "Christ is He who has the keys of death and hell. Christ is the anointed Priest, who alone can absolve sinners. Christ is the fountain of living waters, in whom alone we can be cleansed. Christ is the Prince and Saviour, who alone can give repentance and remission of sins. In Him all fullness dwells."(pp. 408-409)

We also must never forget that it is His church. In Matthew 16:18 Jesus said, "...I will build My church and the gates of Hades shall not overpower it."

So, He gives the commission to us and we go in His authority to build His church.

4. The Plan: What is the commission?

Read Matthew 28:19-20a

The first word is "Go". But, this is not the command. In the Greek language this word is a participle which means that it is translated this way: "As you go..." or "When you go...". In other words, the going was assumed – what else do you do with good news? You go, you don't sit, stay or keep it to yourself...you go! In Mark 16:15 Jesus said, "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation." Luke 24:47 says "...and that repentance for forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in His name to all the nations...". John 20:21 – "...as the Father has sent Me, so I also send you."

Now, does this mean that we have to go to Africa and become missionaries? Not necessarily. But we are to go into our world: family, friends, neighbors and co-workers. We are to be influencers. In the Sermon on the Mount Jesus said we are salt and light. Salt must be applied to the meat as opposed to being kept in the salt shaker. Light must shine in a dark world.

So, the going and the proclaiming is assumed because that is what you do with good news.

"Make disciples" – bingo! This is the command and the only command! A disciple is a learner, follower or pupil. He is an apprentice learning a skill – the skill of being like Jesus Christ.

Kittel, in his massive work *Theological Dictionary of New Testament Words*, says of this concept, "His[Jesus] concern is not to impart information, nor to deepen an existing attitude, but to awaken unconditional commitment to Himself."

This captures the essence of the word “disciple” – one who has made an unconditional commitment to Jesus Christ! A disciple is one who has a relationship with Jesus so that he will become like Jesus. So, Jesus goes beyond preaching and sharing information to making disciples, committed followers who will in turn disciple others. Our “business” is not just to share the gospel, get people down the aisle, get people to join the church, etc. No, our business is to make disciples.

“of all the nations” – this is a world- wide mission; every ethnic group! Again, it does not mean we all have to become missionaries, although the Lord may call you to do that. Let’s face it – in Houston, the world is coming to us! At this time SBC has Bible Study Classes which are taught in Spanish and Farsi plus numerous other outreaches to visitors to our city. Also, the Missions Ministry of our church organizes about 20 fabulous short term (1 -2 weeks) mission trips every year to all parts of the globe.

“baptizing them in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit” Next week we will have a complete lesson on water baptism. Every believer in Jesus is to be baptized and we believe that immersion (going under the water) is the Biblical model and mode. Notice His very clear reference to the Trinity (see Lesson 4 of this class). Public baptism is an outward sign of an inward reality, it testifies to all present that the believer is saved, has broken with his old life and started a new life with Jesus Christ. It is a public profession of faith. Also, water baptism identifies that believer with a local church where he can be nurtured and grow in his faith as a disciple. Baptisms take place at our church in every worship service every weekend as well as on special occasions: retreats, fountain baptism with Dr, Young, etc

“teaching them to observe all I commanded you”. Once a person trusts Jesus Christ as His Savior, the teaching and the learning never stop. Notice that Jesus said to teach them “to observe” all He commanded. “To observe” means “to obey, to guard or to keep intact”. Teaching should result in obedience. It is not just information but transformation. It is not an information dump but teaching to change lives – resulting in the disciple becoming more and more like Jesus Christ in attitudes and actions; obedience is the key. J.C. Ryle said “Obedience is the only proof of reality.” Jesus said in John 15:14, “You are my friends if you do what I command you.”

In addition to strong Biblical preaching from our pulpit every weekend, our church has many classes and small discipleship groups in addition to regular Bible Study classes on Saturday and Sunday.

5. What Does Jesus Promise?

Read Matthew 28:20b

In the second half of verse 20 Jesus promised that He will be with us always – He does not leave us as orphans! Remember the occasion of this commission: Jesus had left the disciples once when He died; now, He was with them in His resurrection body – but, He would leave them again. They needed the assurance that they would not be left on their own. He gives them (and us) that assurance here – we go in His authority and He goes with us!

6. What Power is made available to us to carry out the Great Commission?

Read Luke 24:49 and Acts 1:8

This is right before Jesus ascended into heaven – His last words on earth. He had been with His disciples in His resurrection body for 40 days, teaching them. Now, Jesus instructs them to wait until the Holy Spirit comes upon them. The Holy Spirit will give them (and us) the power and ability to be Jesus' witnesses and to carry out His Great Commission. Lessons 18-22 of this class covered the Holy Spirit and living the Christian life in the power/ability of the Spirit. To briefly recap for our purposes here in relation to the Great Commission, the Holy Spirit...

- Dwells within every believer – John 14:16-17; Romans 8:9. This is how Jesus is with us always
- Teaches us – John 14:26, 16:13. We grow in the faith and are able to disciple others.
- Bears witness of Jesus – John 15:26. He helps us make the gospel clear to others.
- Convicts of sin – John 16:8-11. He convicts and convinces others of their sin as we share the gospel.

Marketing Strategy – dare we use this term? Yes! Jesus gives us the marketing strategy in Acts 1:8:

“Jerusalem” – their immediate vicinity – our “Houston”.

“Judea” – surrounding territory – our “Texas”.

“Samaria” – neighboring territory – our “United States”.

“The remotest part of the earth” – the inhabited earth.

In fact, the Book of Acts demonstrates that this was carried out in the exact order prescribed here:

- Jerusalem – began in Acts 2:1
- Judea & Samaria – began in Acts 8:5, after Stephen was martyred.
- The remainder of the earth – began in Acts 8:26.

On New Member Weekend (February 25-26) we celebrated those the Lord had brought in during 2011. Every year on New Member Weekend, Dr. Young reminds us as a church of several things...

Our Mission Statement: Matthew 28:18-20, The Great Commission, which we have just covered.

Our Marketing Strategy: Acts 1:8

Our Product: The Gospel of Jesus Christ, Romans 1:16-17 (read).

Our Profit: Changed Lives! This is the purpose of New Member Weekend – to hear the stories of some of our newest church members. They are the changed lives that resulted from a personal encounter with our product, the Good News of Jesus Christ.

CONCLUSION

So, that is the business we are in and I would say that business is good! Everything we do at our church we run it through those 4 checkpoints. If it doesn't meet those criteria then we don't do it!

There is one more piece of the puzzle. Often Dr. Young is asked his "secret" to success and building a large church. His answer is simple. He cites John 12:32 in which Jesus said, "And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to Myself." Now, this has a double application of meaning. (1) John tells us in the next verse, verse 33, that Jesus was talking about the kind of death He would die, that He would be lifted up on a cross. (2) The application for ministry is that all we need to do is lift up Jesus, talk about Jesus, introduce people to Jesus and Jesus will draw them to Himself – He will build His church!