

Message Series: A Kingdom Culture

Message Title: **The Great Declaration to be Believed**

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Scripture Text: **Matthew 28: 16-20**

I want to confess this morning that at times, I am pretty impulsive. For example, it is not unusual for me to have a check that I need to deposit in the bank and rush out the door and jump in my car before realizing that I left the check sitting on my desk in my office. I have also done that many times with my glasses. Maybe it's old age. But I don't think I am alone. I think we are living in an impulsive generation.

Look at the slogans of our culture. Slogans like, "Just Do It" and "Get 'Er Done". These slogans leave no room for quiet reflection because that slows you down. Speed and action are the qualities that this generation values. But I have learned over the years that speed and action without quiet reflection can be the difference between having something that's quality and something that is shallow. Zeal without knowledge and reflection may cause us to do things quickly yet it doesn't lend itself to quality work that stands the test of time.

I think the same thing has happened to the Church when it comes to the Great Commission. In our zeal to obey it, we may have not taken the time to read it thoughtfully and deeply. This has led to two errors, both of which must be avoided. First (which I just mentioned) we can be so zealous in fulfilling the mission, we subordinate the message to the mission. In other words, we are so busy with outreach, it trumps the content of the message with which we have been entrusted. But it can work the other way also. We can be so preoccupied with getting the message right, we are not getting it out! D.L. Moody said to someone who criticized his methods, "I like my way of doing it better than your way of not doing it." Paul warns in Romans that zeal without knowledge is deadly but knowledge without zeal is already dead. The Great Commission doesn't lend itself to either extreme.

We are in a series entitled ***A Kingdom Culture***. We are looking at the culture of the kingdom of God. Last week we saw that a kingdom culture is a culture of repentance. For the last three weeks of this series, I want us to stay parked in this section of Matthew commonly known as the "*Great Commission*". What usually comes to mind when we hear the term "*Great Commission*"? Most of us naturally think of evangelism. That is certainly right that we should think that way. Jesus is now calling men he has trained to go out and spread the message to the entire world. Up until this time they had been with Jesus for three and a half years and never left the borders of the land of Israel. Now they were being commissioned to go beyond the borders of Israel and bring the message to the Gentiles—to the nations of the world.

Every one of these men (except for one) would die bringing the Gospel to foreign lands. But if we think of this commission mainly in terms of evangelism we miss it entirely. Because we have thought of it chiefly in terms of evangelism we have justified any kind of evangelism or mission work as fulfilling the Great Commission. The Great Commission in its core essence reveals what is at the heart of a kingdom culture.

There is certainly the central command to be obeyed to “go therefore and make disciples” but in our haste we have not noticed that this commission is sandwiched between two statements which, if we ignore, we will not have a clue what the commission is about. So taken together in context we might say it this way: The Great Commission consists of:

A Great Declaration to be Believed (28:18)

A Great Commission to be Obeyed (28:19)

A Great Promise to be Embraced (28:20)

This morning, I want to start with the first: ‘A Great Declaration to be Believed’. “And Jesus came and said to them, “All authority in heaven and earth has been given to me.” As previously stated, we usually skip over this statement and rush to the words “Go, therefore” and so we go.

But the word “*therefore*” in vs. 19 makes no sense apart from the declaration of vs. 18. Vs. 18 gives us the rationale for vs. 19. We can’t obey the imperative of vs. 19 without understanding the indicative of vs. 18. ***So the Commission starts with a declaration of what God has already done.*** This is the rationale for everything Jesus tells us to do. The Great Commission doesn’t start with the Church doing something for Jesus but with a declaration of what God already accomplished in Jesus. This is in keeping with everything we find in the New Testament.

Every new covenant command is grounded in the Gospel. We love because He first loves us. We choose Christ because He chose us. We are called to holiness because we are already declared holy in Christ, clothed in his righteousness. Therefore, we are no longer under the tyranny of sin and therefore must present our bodies as a living sacrifice. The same is true of the mission. The Church’s mission is grounded in God’s mission which was fulfilled in his Son. Author Michael Horton says,

So the church is what it is not because of its own decision, planning, and zealous activity, but because of God's. Far from eliminating the place for our own response, God's grace is its only possible source. Far from turning us into blocks of stone, with no will or activity, the good news we take to the world—by which we also are saved—liberates our willing and running, so that we can trust in Christ and bear the fruit of the Spirit in love toward God and neighbor. The triumphant indicative—announcing the achievements of the triune God—always comes first. God's gracious performance creates a church in the midst of this present evil age that imperfectly responds by saying "Amen!" in word and deed to all God has willed it to be. Only because it is in Christ is there an assembly of sinners drawn from every people and language—transferred from the kingdom of death to the kingdom of everlasting life.

What did Jesus actually mean when he made this great declaration that “All authority in heaven and earth has been given to me.” Jehovah Witnesses have seized upon this statement as proof that Jesus never claimed to be deity (authority had to be given to him). They are wrong, but we have to admit that this declaration seems contradictory when looked upon at face value. Why does Jesus indicate that he now has all authority in heaven and earth? Didn’t Jesus already have all authority during the days of his

earthly ministry? Didn't he heal the sick and raise the dead and have total authority over the whole realm of the demonic?

He certainly did. But even though He did these things, his authority was still somewhat curtailed. For example, when he heals people he tells them not to make him known. He does raise the dead. And even at the moment of his death some saints are raised. But even though this is astounding, it is not the same thing as having unlimited power and authority in heaven and earth, and having it proclaimed worldwide without any restriction. Then at the end of the age, He will raise all men and women from the dead and be their Judge. In a word, it was not till after his resurrection and subsequent ascension that Jesus of Nazareth gained universal sovereignty.

We have a picture in another book of the New Testament of how it came to be that Jesus wields ultimate authority; it is Revelation 5. Revelation doesn't start with prophecies about the end of time, but with a vision of the exalted Lord and the fact that he now yields ultimate authority. This vision actually starts in chapter four where John sees the throne of God. Before the Lord unveils his plan for the Church in this age, He wants John to clearly understand who is in charge.

The word throne appears 17 times in these two chapters. In chapter four, we are shown the Father in his holiness and absolute sovereignty, the One who rules over heaven and earth. He is surrounded by creatures and elders who do nothing day and night but worship Him Who is Creator and Lord of all. But in chapter 5, He unveils how it is that his Son now exercises ultimate authority in heaven and earth.

The throne of God is now a mediated throne! Remember how this chapter starts? John sees a scroll in the right hand of the One sitting on the throne. An angel proclaims "Who is worthy to open the scroll and break its seals? There was no one among God's creatures that were worthy: not angel, or man, or woman; no one! This is the only time in this book that John begins to weep. That's amazing. He will see dragons and beasts and demons and incredible visions and he will never weep. But he weeps only when no one is found to open the book and break its seals.

What was in that book? We might say that the scroll is a testament of an inheritance to be received. God promised to Adam and Eve that they would reign over the earth ('Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth').

God purposed that Adam and Eve would be his vice-regents over this planet. Under God, man was to exercise rulership but Adam and Eve forfeited their promised inheritance. Nevertheless, the promise that human beings would have dominion over the earth still stood. But how could anyone be worthy since all the sons of men had sinned? (That's why John said no one was found worthy in heaven or earth or under the earth to open the scroll). No wonder John wept. If there was no one to be found in heaven or earth who could receive the inheritance that human beings would have dominion, then it has been set aside. But then we are introduced to God's eternal plan. God the Son would leave his heavenly home and become a human being and live on this earth for thirty three years. Unlike Adam who disobeyed, Jesus of Nazareth alone of all the children of men perfectly obeyed. But then He would give up his life to the Father as a sacrificial lamb and then rise from the dead, conquering death.

That's why John says that one of the 24 elders told him, 'Wait. Don't weep. There is one who is worthy. There is one who perfectly obeyed, who descends from David and the tribe of Judah'. He died and has overcome so that he can open the scroll and its seven seals! Then John looks and He sees a Lamb standing as if it had been slain and He stepped up and took the scroll from the right hand of him seated on the throne. Then heaven went nuts. "Worthy is the Lamb who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing."

All heaven directs their worship to "Him who sits on the throne and unto the Lamb". The Divine Mediator became a Lamb who was slain and through his death he purchased men and women from every tribe, language, people and nation. The authority of the throne is now exercised by a Lamb who was slain. But He is no longer a Lamb slain but a Lamb who was slain who is now the Risen and Exalted One. He exercises complete authority in heaven and earth, being Sovereign over all!

It was critical that John and the churches he was writing to understand this. After chapter five, the rest of Revelation was written to prepare the Church for how it will be treated by the world between the first and second coming. The Church will suffer much to be faithful as a witness to Christ. It would be easy to think that Jesus isn't reigning, that the Lord is not in charge. He is telling John (and us) in chapters 4 and 5, that these things are not happening because the Lord isn't in charge, **but because He is in charge**. He knows that the Church will be tempted to think that the Lord has abandoned her and that the devil is now ruling. But even though terrible things will happen to the Church, Jesus is Lord! In fact, even the evil that Satan and his cohorts unleash is under his control.

We see an example in Revelation 13. John sees this terrible beast arising out of the sea to make war against the saints. But there is a phrase which is quite disconcerting: "And the beast was given a mouth uttering haughty and blasphemies against God, blaspheming his name and his dwelling, that is, those who dwell in heaven. Also, it was allowed to make war on the saints and to conquer them. And authority was given it over every tribe and people and language and nation and all who dwell on earth will worship it, everyone whose name has not been written before the foundation of the world in the book of life of the Lamb who was slain." Our God reigns. Even what the Church will suffer from this beast has to be given it from Another; the One who is really in charge!

The most important thing about the Great Declaration is it teaches us that a kingdom culture is a Jesus culture. ***The Church can get a lot of things wrong but it must get its Christology right! That's because the most important thing about the Church is what it thinks about Jesus!*** Listen to how Paul ends the first chapter of Ephesians. Paul is praying for these saints.

For this reason, because I have heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love toward all the saints, I do not cease to give thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers, that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of him, having the eyes of your hearts enlightened, that you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe, according to the working

of his great might that he worked in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come. And he put all things under his feet and gave him as head over all things to the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all.

Ephs. 1: 15-23

And this wasn't just airy theology for academics. It had practical effect on the way God intended saints to live. Paul wrote a letter to the Christians in the Asian city of Colosse. Paul trained Epaphras and then sent him back to Colosse to plant a church. That church was birthed on Paul's Gospel through his son Epaphras. But Asia Minor in those days was a seedbed of Mystery Religions. The Colossians thought that Paul's Gospel with its focus on Christ alone was a little bland. It needed some salt and pepper. So they mixed it up with some mysticism and asceticism and legalism and experientialism so it seemed much better. Pretty soon you had Jesus plus mystical experiences, Jesus and harsh treatment of the body, Jesus plus rigorous rules, Jesus plus neat experiences.

But for Paul, if you add anything to the Gospel you have distorted it. He writes to these Christians to remind them that it is Jesus alone that they need, not Jesus and religion, Jesus and rules, Jesus and experiences. Listen to how he masterfully guides them back to Jesus:

He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him. And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together. And he is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything he might be preeminent. For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross

Col. 1:15-20

Okay. Jesus is all those things. But what does that mean for me? How does that help me? Let's read on:

And you, who once were alienated and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds, he has now reconciled in his body of flesh by his death, in order to present you holy and blameless and above reproach before him, if indeed you continue in the faith, stable and steadfast, not shifting from the hope of the gospel that you heard, which has been proclaimed in all creation under heaven, and of which I, Paul, became a minister.

Col. 1: 21-23

Paul sums it up more simply in Col. 2:9: "For in him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily, and you have been filled in him who is the head of all rule and authority."

Let's go back to our theme text (Matthew 28:18). Why does Jesus then make this claim? So that the Church, which is called to live out this commission might first know that their resurrected and ascended Lord has the sovereignty and authority and power to assure that it succeeds! Sometimes in modern missions conferences our Lord is presented as nervously wringing his hands in the heavens, worried that the Church might fail to carry out the commission. That's not what Jesus says at all. He tells these men (and us) that before you go, you better understand that I am the Sovereign One, that I have all authority and my purpose will be accomplished! Because all authority in heaven and earth is given to Jesus Christ, we are sent into the world with the confidence that God's mission will be accomplished. I hear faint traces in this of Psalm 46: "Be still and know that I am God. I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth!"

Think what comfort this idea that my Lord has absolute sovereignty gives to the believer. God is in control of my life and my Shepherd is leading me in everything. (The Lord is my Shepherd). I can have confidence even when I don't understand why He seems distant or is allowing things to happen in my life. And perhaps most of all, I can endure suffering because I know my God has chosen it for me so I will gladly learn to kiss the cross.

"All authority in heaven and earth has been given to me." Are you trusting Jesus alone? Are you resting in Jesus alone? Is your confidence in Jesus alone? What are you trusting in for your relationship to God? What you are able to perform or the perfect work of Jesus Christ? All authority in heaven and earth is given to him. Are you submitting to that authority? Are you a Christian because you go to a building and go through religious motions? Maybe the most important thing for TCC is "Are we trusting Jesus to accomplish the mission?"

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The questions below are provided by Ed Rosen for your use in House Church Group Discussion.

1. What is the danger of zeal without reflection?
2. In what way does this relate to fulfilling the Great Commission?
3. Neil said "In our zeal to obey the Great Commission, we may have not taken the time to read it thoughtfully and deeply. This has led to two errors, both of which must be avoided." What are the two errors?
4. Why is the Great commission more than what we commonly refer to as "evangelism"?
5. To quote Neil again, "There is certainly the central command to be obeyed to "Go therefore and make disciples" but in our haste we have not noticed that this commission is sandwiched between two statements which, if we ignore, we will not have a clue what the commission is about." Based on Neil's text (Matthew 28:18-20) What are the two statements?
6. The Great Commission begins with Jesus' statement, "All authority in heaven and earth has been given to me."
 - a. What does Jesus mean by this? Didn't He always have "all authority"?

- b. Why does the fulfilling of the Great Commission depend on this statement by Jesus?
 - c. Why can't we understand the imperative of verse 19, "Go therefore" without understanding the indicative of verse 18, "All authority in heaven and earth has been given to me."?
7. Neil talked about the seven sealed scroll in Revelation chapter 5.
- a. What is contained in the seven sealed scroll?
 - b. How does this relate to what Neil referred to as the "Dominion Mandate" of Genesis chapter 1 verse 28, "And God blessed them. And God said to them, Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth."?
 - c. What is the connection then between Revelation 5:5, "And one of the elders said to me, 'Weep no more; behold, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has conquered, so that he can open the scroll and its seven seals.' And Matthew 28:18, "All authority in heaven and earth has been given to me."?
 - d. In light of this what does Paul mean when he refers to Jesus as "the last Adam" in 1 Corinthians 15:45, "Thus it is written, "The first man Adam became a living being", the last Adam became a life-giving spirit."?
8. Does Jesus' statement that "All authority in heaven and earth has been given to me", give you confidence to "Go therefore" and fulfill the Great Commission?
9. Lastly, why is our Christology of utmost importance?