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Holy Trinity

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Reformation L.C.
Matthew 28:16-20

The Great Commission: A Burden or Invitation?

Then the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had told them to go. 17When they saw him, they worshiped him; but some doubted. 18Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. 19Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, 20and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."

A Burden or Invitation

In our reading from Matthew we come across the Great Commission. If you have been a Christian for any length of time you know the Great Commission. You might have learned it in Sunday school, a missionary's visit, VBS, or your grandmother's lap. The Great Commission is why you are a Christian in the first place.

The question is not if you know the Great Commission, rather do you hear the commission as a burden or an invitation? Do these words excite or bother you? Do these words compel or condemn you? This is an important question because when mission is a burden one gives a burden's effort. However, when mission is a wonderful invitation, saturated by the love of Christ, it accomplishes everything.

When Hudson Taylor was director of the China Inland Mission, he often interviewed candidates for the mission field. He would ask, "Why do you wish to go as a foreign missionary?" They would usually say, "I want to go because Christ has commanded us to go into the world and preach the gospel to every creature." Or they would say, "I want to go because millions are perishing without Christ." Taylor would reply, "These motives, however good, will fail you in times of testing, trials, tribulations, and possible death. There is but one motive that will sustain you in trial and testing; namely, the love of Christ."

Is the Great Commission an invitation or a burden? It is my aim in today's sermon to not burden you with the Great Commission but to set your heart free. I cannot do this on my own. Instead we need the Holy Spirit's help. "Come Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of your people and kindle in us the power of your love."

The Heart of Mission

Turn with me to Matthew 28. The context is that Jesus has risen from the dead. He is in Galilee before his ascension. Verse 16 says, "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." It is amazing that some doubted. The resurrected Jesus is standing before them and some doubted. They must have been Lutheran.

What is more amazing is that Jesus did not rebuke or shame them. Instead, we read: "Jesus came to them" (28:18). In other words, Jesus the Good Shepherd sought them in the midst of their doubt.

We must not pass over this picture. The origin of missions begins in the shepherd's heart. In love, Jesus came to seek and save the lost. In love, Jesus came to die for the whole world. In love, Jesus came to his disciples as they doubted. It is this love that is the source world missions. That is why Jesus said, "I have other sheep that are not of this sheep pen. I must bring them also. They too will listen to my voice, and there shall be one flock and one shepherd" (John 10:16).

It is also with love that Jesus speaks to his doubting disciples: "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me" (28:18). These words are meant to bring comfort. As John Piper explains:

All authority means all authority over Satan and all demons, over all angels -good and evil - over the natural universe, natural objects, laws and forces: stars, galaxies, planets; authority over all weather systems: winds, rains, lightning; authority over all molecular and atomic reality: atoms, electrons, chromosomes; authority over all plants and animals great and small: whales and redwoods, giant squid and giant oaks; authority over all the parts and functions of the human body: every beat of the heart, every breath of the diaphragm, every electrical jump across a million synapses in our brains; authority over all nations and governments: congresses and legislatures and presidents; authority over all armies and weapons and terrorists; authority over all business and finance and currency; authority over education and research and discovery; authority over all families and neighborhoods; and over the church, and over every soul and every moment of every life that has been or ever will be lived. All authority means all authority!

All authority belongs to Jesus. Do not doubt.

A Sunday school teacher was teaching her class they did not need to fear because Jesus was their Lord. She asked if any of them were afraid of not having enough money. One boy raised his hand and said, "No, my dad is the president of the town bank." That did not work so the teacher asked if any of them were afraid of not having enough food. A little girl raised her hand and said, "No, my mom own two grocery stores!" Realizing this was not working, the teacher asked if they were afraid of hell." The pastor's son raised his hand and said, "No, my dad owns hell. He came home last night and told my mom that the Church Board gave it to him!"

All authority belongs to Jesus. We do not need to fear what we will eat or drink. We do not need to fear the unknown. We do not need to fear sharing the gospel. All authority belongs to Jesus.

The Great Commission

It is only after Jesus meets them in their doubt that he invites them into the Great Commission. Verse 19: "Therefore go and 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" (28:19-20). Every phrase is important.

Go and make disciples of all nations. Does it surprise you that God desires people from all nations. All throughout the Bible we are told of the nations worshiping God.

- I will surely bless you, and I will surely multiply your offspring as the stars of heaven and as the sand that is on the seashore. And your offspring shall possess the gate of his enemies, and in your offspring shall all the nations of the earth be blessed (Genesis 22:17-18).
- All the nations you have made shall come and worship before you, O Lord, and shall glorify your name (Psalm 86:9).
- After this I looked, and behold, a great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, with palm branches in their hands, and crying out with a loud voice, "Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb! (Revelation 7:9-10).

There will not be a more beautiful sight than seeing the nations gathered together to praise God.

James Nestingen tells a story about preaching in Africa. He said he was asked to preach on Psalm 23. It was in the evening. There were lanterns hanging on the walls. The church was filled. He knew that it was customary to preach for over an hour. And so he did. He preached with everything he had. At the end of the hour he sat down. One of the leaders got up, brought him water, and said, "I cannot wait to hear the second half of your sermon." Nestingen was shocked but went on. He stood up and preached for another half hour and then sat down. He was exhausted. Then a woman stood up and began to sing. As she sang other voices joined in. Then the people began to dance and you could see their shadows dancing on the walls. Seeing their shadows and hearing their voices moved him to deep tears. He said it was one of the most beautiful experiences of his life.

There might not be anything more beautiful. Except maybe how we make disciples? *"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."* Think about the name in which we are baptized. Thank God we are not baptized in the name of Moses. This would mean our whole life would be one of trying to fulfill the law. Thank God we are not baptized in John's name. Then we would constantly have to throw ourselves into the waters of repentance. Rather, we are baptized in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. There is no name that has more love. There is no name that has more benefits. American is a good name. Lutheran is a good name. But these pale in comparison to the name "Father, Son, and Holy Spirit."

Next is Jesus' words. Jesus is the Word of God. Jesus has the words of eternal life. Words such as Matthew 11, "Come unto me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light" (Matthew 11:28-20). We are baptized in the sweetest name and are given the sweetest of words.

And if these words were not enough, Jesus ends with one last promise: "And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age." Jesus does not abandon us. Jesus is with us always. Linda Giesy sent me a letter about the importance of God being with us.

Good Morning Russ: Sam has just given me your sermon and it gave me a warm and fuzzy feeling to read that you mentioned my confirmation verse in the sermon. I was confirmed on June 16, 1929, and my confirmation verse read, "Be content with such

things as ye have: for He hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee." That verse has given me a lot of comfort through my 90 years. Take care and God bless, Linda.

Jesus is with us. We have no need to doubt.

Conclusion

Back to the original question: Is the Great Commission an obligation or invitation? I guess it matters who it is from. If Jesus is a task master, then it is an obligation. However, if Jesus is our Lord and savior, then it is the best of invitations. Jesus is the Good Shepherd who seeks out the lost. He has sought you. With the authority of heaven and earth he has called you by name. In the waters of baptism and by his Word Jesus has claimed you. He will never leave or forsake you. And so he says, "Go." Go with the power of heaven behind you. Go with the love of God within you. Go with Christ beside you.

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

**In Jesus' Sweet Name,
Amen**

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