



How to Fulfill the Great Commission Matthew 28:16-20

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INTRODUCTION

The Key question for this topical message is how does the church fulfill the Great Commission? Perhaps you could be overwhelmed by all the things a church could do; how do we know we're doing enough? You could wonder about the connection between all that mission activity overseas and what actually takes place here on Sunday morning and in the life of the church. You might simply need to be reminded; what are we trying to build when we do missions overseas?

Back to our key question: How does the church fulfill this Great Commission?

Main Points: Preach, Practice and Wait.

- Preach and receive the Word.
- Practice the marks of a true church.
- Wait for the King.

1) Preach and Receive the Word

I know I don't have to convince you that preaching is important! But I will have to say more about why this point isn't just for the pastors. But before we get to that, let's just remind ourselves about the "Word" part of that sentence. The Word is:

Powerful:

To say the Word is powerful is to say: it is what we must have to accomplish our task. It is the engine, the driving force, for what God is doing. It is not as though God has given us a blueprint, or a job description, and then told us, "I don't know how you'll get it done. Figure it out on your own." The Word is the power to accomplish God's Great Commission.

Sufficient:

To say the Word is powerful, is to say that it is what we need to accomplish God's purpose. To say the Word is sufficient, is to say that it is all that we need.

You almost don't need a separate point to make this clear. If it's the powerful Word of God If it is that about which the Lord God Almighty says, "This will accomplish my purposes!" then it stands to reason we probably don't need to find anything else to give it power. If it's powerful with the power that created the universe, then it's sufficient. We don't need to say it – but let's say it. No additional strategies needed, no additional, extra-Scriptural wisdom or principles needed...the Word alone can do what God requires!

**Redemptive:**

The Word is what we need, it is all we need, but what is it for? We've said it already: for God's purposes. But what are God's purposes? To redeem the people of God from every tribe, tongue, and nation to the glory of God.

The Word is powerful, it does things. It is sufficient and it alone does all that God wants done. And it is redemptive – what God is doing with his Word is creating a global people for himself.

Application:

To pastors: keep doing what you're doing! To men sitting here who may be future pastors: to be a pastor is to be called to minister the Word.

But I didn't say only "Preach the Word" but "Preach and receive the Word." That's really important in this context. I'm not just talking to pastors. And understanding that "Receive" part keeps us from turning this point into passivity, quietism, withdrawal. Anything in which we're not actually actively engaged in pursuing the Great Commission. With "Receive" I have in mind that good soil of Jesus' parable, the soil that received the Word and then bore fruit. And there's a reciprocal relationship between that kind of reception of the Word and the preaching of the Word.

Illustration:

My wife and I both have arts and crafts hobby-businesses. She has a YouTube channel teaching and producing a particular school of painting called fluid art. I have a blacksmith shop. She teaches online, I teach in person and have also been a student of blacksmithing in a lot of different contexts. When her videos premiere, people follow along and comment live as she paints. Some people watch because they want to learn, or are actively painting and want to grow in their skills. They ask a particular kind of question, what we call in the arts and crafts world "Good questions." Then there are the other people, who ask what we technically call "Stupid questions." It's absolutely clear they are completely passive consumers of this video, with no background ever doing the technique and no intention of doing anything else but passively consuming! And the questions show it.

In fact, what the question often reveals is that you really didn't even understand what you were hearing and passively consuming. You thought you did, but until you actually do it you don't even know what questions to ask, or what you need to hear.

The church that passively consumes a 30-45 minute sermon with no intention of doing anything is like that. But the church that receives the Word with the soil of a good heart is fruitful and actually hears and receives far more, and wants to hear more, which stirs the pastors to preach



the Word and the church to lean into the Word corporately and individually...and the virtuous cycle goes on and on.

Examples:

Specific sermon series that do specific things in a church. [Last and next sermon series for Kingsway.] Our example with Colossians 4 and the mission room.

The Word “reverberating” in countless ways

- o One-on-one care and ministry.
- o Fellowship after church.
- o Parenting and family life.
- o David Powlison’s 3-legged stool: public, private, and interpersonal ministry of the Word.
- Praying back the Word.

Back to Matthew 28, the church that preaches and receives the Word will “Make disciples...teaching them to observe all I have commanded you...” And because that teaching includes this text (and others like it), part of that teaching and obeying will include evangelism and missions, fulfilling the Great Commission locally and globally.

2) Practice the marks

For all our gratitude to 9Marks, by “the marks” I’m not referring to the nine marks. I’m referring to what the Reformers identified as the absolutely necessary components of a true church. The church is under the authority of the Word, and therefore the Word defines what is a true church, and what is not. In essence, there are two marks: the Word and the sacraments. Proper church discipline was often added to make explicit what is implicit in baptism and the Lord’s Supper.

Now these are basic, and you’ve been well taught on them. I am not going to teach on what they are or exactly how they should be done. Why would we talk about them now under the Great Commission?

Well we could say it is right in our text, Jesus says in the Great Commission Baptize and we want to obey him. That is a good impulse and is sufficient to get us started.

We could also say that, unless we obey the commands to practice baptism, Lord’s Supper, and church discipline, we can’t plant and grow faithful churches in other places. If we’re unfaithful

locally, how can we export faithfulness globally? That would be another reason to talk about the marks of the church here on Great Commission Sunday.



But I want to suggest a slightly different angle. What are we witnessing to, or bearing witness about, when we order ourselves rightly as the church of God by faithfully practicing these marks? What do the nations see that they wouldn't otherwise see if we neglected these things?

Baptism:

Baptism marks off a person as a citizen of the kingdom, a representative of Jesus, a child of the Almighty God. This one is united to Jesus by faith through the Spirit, and is thus a recipient of all his benefits. Jesus Christ nourishes and cherishes this one. This man, this woman, this awkward teen in love with Jesus. This one is now one of the joints and ligaments with which the body grows. They're vital! They're now a necessary part of God's mission through your church. This one has access to the Father through Jesus in the Spirit.

Even more: we're witnessing to all the surrounding societies – whether Midlothian, Windhoek, La Paz or any other place that you get to partner with where another society lives in their midst. Another kingdom exists right in the middle of this earthly kingdom. Jonathan Leeman's phrase: "The church as the embassy of the Kingdom of Heaven".

Hypothetical example: what if, in one of these contexts, someone really influential and important person gets saved such as a mayor, a business owner, a prime minister, or a governor! They undergo clear salvation, and they come to be baptized on a Sunday and admitted to church membership. And members of the press show up because it's newsworthy, and friends or associates show up just to try and figure out what's going on in Mr. or Mrs. Famous' life. And that person is baptized, right after the awkward pimply teen and right before the middle-aged widow converted from the slums in door-to-door evangelism. No distinction made, no difference in prominence or joy as these three people are welcomed by the church. What are we bearing witness to? This is a different society and a different kingdom than anywhere else.

Transition: when a church practices, and rightly values, baptism for what it signifies – then it will have its first priorities straight. These few, these precious few, must be cared for, must be nourished and cherished. Again: it is not that we're inward focused only. But because we know the precious privilege of belonging to the family of God, we long to see the lost come to share in these benefits. But not because we have forgotten the significance of belonging to the people of God.

Lord's Supper:

What happens when your church takes the Lord's Supper? The gathered people of God eat in the presence of God.

Think of the full sweep of redemptive history. In Genesis 3, the action of "Taking" and "Eating" is what undid us all. Why are the cultures of the world so broken? Why is injustice rampant? Because Adam and Eve took and ate what they should not have taken and eaten! At that moment, they couldn't know what they had unleashed, the groaning of the whole creation, the



tears of the broken-hearted, the anguish of death that would hang over the whole human race from that moment onwards. But God knew! When he promised One to come who would crush the head of the serpent, he knew: God himself would taste death before “Take and eat” become offers of salvation! To the world, Sunday is not a day when things happen. The plans of the nations aren’t advanced on Sundays. From heaven’s perspective, of all days of the week this comes closest to the restoration of all things! How do you know? Look! Jew and Gentile, black and white, poor and rich – they’re gathering around the table of the Lord and eating in his presence! The world is being put back together again – but you’ll miss it, if you were expecting it to look like the world’s way of putting the world back together again.

Every time we take from the Lord’s Supper together we are witnessing to a different hope for true and lasting peace than any solution the world has ever offered.

And don’t forget the words we read every time: “As often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim his death...until he returns.” Every culture has its rhythms. If you trace them, they trace the arc of our expectations. They proclaim our hopes. This is what we hope in. This is what we’re waiting for. But we have a different rhythm, an eschatological, heavenly rhythm. “Until he comes. Until he comes. Until he comes.” Week by week, month by month. This is not yet a feast. It’s just bread, and a cup. But this isn’t the end. We’re still waiting. And oh, the feast we are waiting for, when God swallows up death forever and wedding of the Lamb has come!

Will the world be renewed? Will all wounds be healed? Will justice carry the day? Yes. Just watch. The people of God, expelled from the garden by rebellious eating, are now welcomed back at the table of the Lord. Week by week. Month by month. We’re witnessing to this hope every time we do this.

Church Discipline:

What are we witnessing to when we practice church discipline faithfully? And why talk about it on a Great Commission Sunday?

Here I want to bring in a phrase that, depending on your background, could come to your mind when you think about the mission of the church, and what’s actually supposed to be part of our Great Commission mission. That phrase is “Social justice.” Now, it’s become a political football, it’s been polarized and bent in so many directions that it’s impossible to know what anyone person means when they use that phrase. At its best, people sometimes mean by that “We care about sin and righteousness everywhere we find it – whether that’s in the human heart or in a society at large.” That’s not wrong. At its worst, it can be weaponized as an accusation against the church (maybe even on a missions Sunday), Why are we talking about sending missionaries? Shouldn’t we be digging wells and fighting trafficking instead? Aren’t these more urgent problems of injustice and brokenness?



Here's what I want to suggest in this context. Of course Christians should never be for injustice. Heaven forbid! But we should move slowly with a vague and imprecise term like social justice, and ask at least two really important questions: which society? And whose standard of justice? Because, biblically speaking, there is only one society in which true, perfect, and lasting justice will one day be found: the people of God. And we witness to that reality now when churches practice church discipline.

We proclaim, with broken hearts and tears in our eyes, that such conduct has no place in the kingdom of God. It is conduct unbecoming of a citizen of heaven. We proclaim to a watching world and to the heavenly realms that the kingdom of God is a kingdom in which righteousness dwells. It will have no dark underbelly, no seedy side.

Church discipline is an act of social justice with eternal consequences. We witness to that when we rightly order ourselves, which includes acknowledging the threat of indwelling sin even in our midst as the people of God. We can be lost in our sin and need the severe warning and the heavy mercy of church discipline. And we can be deceived and have in our midst wolves in sheep's clothing. Church discipline witnesses to the world that King Jesus cares about such

things, and that no other society will ever achieve a just and lasting peace apart from submission to the reign of the Prince of Peace. Which is why we do missions: to take that gospel of peace to every society, and witness to it in our life together as we practice the marks of the true people of God.

3) Wait for our King

Back to text: "All authority has been given...and I am with you always, to the end of the age." There's a time marker. The same as in the Lord's Supper: "Until he returns." The Great Commission is the commission of King Jesus – and that commission always involves waiting. When the waiting part ceases, the Great Commission is done!

Another way to say it: the way kingship language is used in the Bible traces an arc – and it's an arc that, for now, always involves waiting.

Exodus 15: first place the phrase "The LORD reigns" appears in all Scripture. The sovereign Lord has demonstrated his power in awesome fashion! The Lord, who is a man of war, has defeated his enemies – their bodies are even now bobbing in the Red Sea. The people of God sing a song of victory on the shore. But it ends with waiting:

Exodus 15:17-18 "You will bring them in and plant them on your own mountain, the place, O LORD, which you have made for your abode, the sanctuary, O Lord, which your hands have established. The LORD will reign forever and ever."



The Lord will reign forever and ever – but his people at this point are still waiting to be planted on his mountain, in his presence.

The Psalms: the Psalms are preeminently the book of the King. But that same arc of kingship is there, too. Psalm 2: The nations rage, the kings of the earth plot...and the Lord laughs. “I have set my King on Zion, my holy hill. He will dash the nations with a rod of iron.” But when we meet this king in Psalm 3, he is fleeing from Absalom and pleading for the Lord’s help. He goes out to battle, rejoicing in the Lord’s strength (Psalm 20 and 21) – but then he cries out, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” (Psalm 22). Where is this nation-conquering king? It can’t David, or Solomon. By the time we reach Psalm 89, Israel is crying out, “Have you forgotten your covenant? Our king’s stronghold lies in ruins, and he is mocked by all who surround him?” Where is this king we are waiting for? The people of God are still waiting for their king. So where do they turn? Psalm 90: to the everlasting Lord, who has been our refuge before the mountains were brought forth. And they sing, while still waiting, “The Lord reigns! He will come to judge the world. The Lord reigns!” But we’re still waiting. Even by Psalm 149, when we sing, “Let the children of Zion rejoice in their King!” the people of God still have the praises of the Lord on their lips, and swords in their hands. There are still nations to subdue, and kings to bind. The raging kings of Psalm 2 still aren’t subdued! They’re still raging. Only in the end, in the last psalm, is there nothing left but hallelujahs. Only then will the heavenly anthem have drowned out all music but its own.

Brothers and sisters, we are still waiting. Waiting for our king. The new testament book that perhaps most celebrates the glories of this king is Revelation. Our Savior is the king of Kings! His voice is like the thunder of many waters, his eyes burn like fire. Yet, in that book, Jesus reigns in heaven and Satan rages on earth. However you interpret Revelation and the eschatological vision – we’re still waiting for the King on his white horse to place all his enemies under his feet, and wipe every tear from our eyes.

Do you feel that tension when we talk about missions, that longing, that incompleteness? We should – it’s not wrong, and in fact it shows we’re really understanding the scope of the commission. It really is beyond us! Do you feel that tension?

- In days of small beginnings – in Namibia, or Bolivia?
- In awareness of those you haven’t been able to share the gospel with in your neighborhood, or workplace?
- In unsaved children?
- The tension of waiting doesn’t mean you’re doing something wrong. It is not like the kind of feeling you have when you are driving on an unfamiliar road and you wonder. Did I miss the turn? And the longer you go (Illustration: driving down a strange road and wondering, “Did I miss the turn?”) And the longer it goes on the more you think this can’t be right.



Great Commission Sunday is not a happy Sunday because, this year, you could measure a lot of mission activity and progress. That is a happy thing! But Great Commission Sunday would still be a happy thing in ten years, or fifteen years, or twenty years even if all your markers of activity haven't gained ground, but have maybe even lost ground – as long as you're still faithful. When a church faithfully preaches and receives the Word, practices the marks, and still has to wait...it isn't inherently less useful in the Great Commission.

CONCLUSION:

It's couched in symbolic language, but one of the most potent mission promises and pictures in the New Testament is language from the book of Revelation:

"The words of the holy one, the true one, who has the key of David, who opens and no one will shut, who shuts and no one opens. " 'I know your works. Behold, I have set before you an open door, which no one is able to shut."

That's a promise for the gospel to forward in unstoppable power! But you know what church received this promise in Revelation? Philadelphia, about whom Jesus says this:

"I know that you have but little power, and yet you have kept my word and have not denied my name."

They are apparently given a powerful mission opportunity! And it goes hand in hand with corresponding lack of power. But what Jesus measures them by is not their power, but their faithfulness.

When you think of Great Commission Sunday, do you feel small? Do you have little power? That's fine. Because you're waiting for a King who is not small, and who has more than "little power." In seasons of blessing, and in seasons of adversity – we're still waiting. That's why so many NT exhortations have this form: a command, followed by some form of "Until," followed by the Lord's coming or death. "Be faithful." For how long? "Unto death." Hold on to the same earnestness of hope. How long? Until the end.

How do we participate in the Great Commission? Preach and receive the Word. Practice. And wait.