

The mission of the church (1): authority and promise (Matthew 28:18, 20b)

Matthew 28:16–20 contains what is often called ‘the Great Commission’. Before leaving His disciples to return to heaven, Jesus commanded them to make disciples. Preceding the actual command Jesus declares the authority which He was given (v. 18) and following the command He gives a promise (v. 20b). Together they encourage and strengthen His disciples to fulfill the mission which He gives.

I. *Strength in knowing the authority of Jesus*

1. *The authority of the Messiah became universal.*

The pre-incarnate Son of God had full authority (cf. Hebrews 1:2–3; Colossians 1:16–17). But during His earthly ministry He limited Himself. He maintained authority (cf. Matthew 7:29; 10:1; 11:27) and was aware of His greater authority (cf. Matthew 22:44; 24:35). But He accepted His Father’s limitation to being sent only to the house of Israel (Matthew 15:24; cf. Matthew 10:5–6; Acts 10:36).

As the resurrected Redeemer-Messiah, His authority now extends universally, not only to the house of Israel, but now through His disciples to make disciples of all nations.

2. *The universal authority of Messiah Jesus has consequences for the mission of the church.*

a. He defines the mission.

Neither the church nor the culture has the authority to redefine the mission. Therefore, it is important to understand what Jesus has commanded.

b. He commands the mission.

The apostles understood this (cf. Acts 4:18–20; 5:29), though Peter and the Jerusalem church needed special instruction about proclaiming forgiveness to the Gentiles (Acts 10:1–11:18). As persecution spread the church, some finally proclaimed Christ also to the Greek-speaking non-Jews. God blessed this and from that church in Antioch the mission to the nations spread.

c. He overrules the opposition.

The advance of the gospel through Paul’s imprisonment is a good example (Philippians 1:12–13). The Lord provides armor and strength in the spiritual conflict (Ephesians 6:10–20) and even uses non-Christians to thwart opposition (e.g., Gamaliel in Acts 5:34–39). When He opens no one can shut and what He shuts none can open (Revelation 3:7–8).

II. *Strength in knowing the promise of Jesus*

1. *The promise extends to all disciples.*

None of those present probably lived beyond the first century. But the promise of His presence “until the end of the age” in the context of the commission implies that the promise extends to other disciples who come after the Eleven. Since they belong to the foundation of the church (Ephesians 2:20), it also fits that they are representative recipients of the commission and promise for the church.

Hence, the command and the promise extends to you as a child of God. The Lord Jesus will use all His disciples to build His church.

2. *The promise is for every day till the end of the age.*

“Always” translates a phrase meaning as well “every day” or even “the whole of every day.” Throughout every day until Christ concludes this age, He is with each of His disciples. Therefore, know that Jesus Christ by His Spirit is with you as a child of God. Whatever the challenge know that He will not forsake (e.g., Hebrews 13:5). In the context of the Great Commission He is with you to guide and help fulfill His commission.

Believers have been given a truly great commission, resting on Jesus’ authority and supported by His promise. Take strength from the authority that is behind the mission and from the promise that accompanies it.

Questions for further thought and discussion:

- What other “authorities” exist and why in light of that does knowing that Jesus has received all authority strengthen us to fulfill the mission of the church?
- What is most encouraging to about Jesus’ constant presence with you? Why?