

How the great Commission addresses human need

Matthew 28:16-20

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. Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. 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. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."

INTRODUCTION.

- 26,000 children died today of hunger and preventable diseases¹.
- No less than 4.5 billion people on our planet are without Christ and, therefore, without hope in this world.

In light of these sobering realities, I think we need to recognize the gospel mandate to proclaim and demonstrate Christ's love to the world. Why is it that after 2000 years since Christ came into the world, the world continues to be in so much need?

Illustration:

Chris Wright addressing the 3rd Lausanne Congress for world evangelization in Oct 2010 in Cape Town said: "What do you think is the greatest obstacle to God's desire for the evangelisation of the world? It's not other religions. It's not persecution. It's not resistant cultures.

"The greatest problem for God in his redemptive mission for the world is his own people."

"What hurts God the most is not just the sin of the world but the failure, the disobedience and the rebellion of those whom God has redeemed and called to be his people."

As I have reflected on this sobering statement by Chris I think the 3 challenges we face in fulfilling the Great Commission are:

- **Confidence**
- **Credibility**
- **Clarity**

This morning, we will examine the "Great Commission" and how it relates to the third mark of mission-meeting human need through loving service.

¹ Source: UNICEF State of the World's Children, 2008

1. THE COMMISSION ADDRESSES THE CONFIDENCE ISSUE

When Jesus came to the disciples, he said, "**All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me**" (v 18). The Father gave Jesus "all authority."

In the world today there is great need-much suffering, darkness, evil and death. The one and only power that can overcome human need and transform individuals, communities and nations is the power of the gospel. We need to have confidence in the power of the gospel to change lives.

I think one of the amazing aspects of this text is the contrast between the extent of the commission that the Lord gave, and the sense of relative insignificance of this little band of men. Here were eleven men who were told to go out and conquer the world and lay it at the Lord's feet. Eleven insignificant men! Whose hopes had almost been dashed when Jesus died. Is it any wonder that some doubted.

These were men who perhaps had never been more than 50 miles from home or outside the country of Palestine. Jesus simply asked them to go and did not leave them a legacy, Trust funds or money in the bank. So they had no funds to carry out this assignment. He had no basis of political power. He had already been rejected by his own nation. And yet he tells them, "Go, and make disciples of all nations."

We realize now that the secret of their success was not the size, or the power, skills or the material qualifications of the group, but rather, the divine authority given to them by the Lord. In verse 18 Jesus says, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. **The authority that Jesus received is comprehensive in nature.** The Greek word (*exousia*) translated *authority* "denotes active power; the full ability to do as one wills." This means that Christ's desire will be accomplished and that His commands must be carried out. "in heaven and on earth." Jesus has been given cosmic dominion not only over the physical universe and everything in it but also over everything spiritual:

When Jesus walked the earth the wind and sea obeyed His every word. He healed diseases and He even raised the dead. Jesus by His death and resurrection has crushed death in all its forms.

Because Jesus created all things and has been given "all authority," there is absolutely nothing outside his authority.

Because Jesus has all authority, he has instructed his people to go in the world with the Gospel by his great authority.

Today being Trinity Sunday, we remember the relationship between the Father, Son and the Holy Spirit. The Father had given to the Son the authority, and the Son, by means of the Holy Spirit, gave to the disciples the authority to go out bring men into a relationship with him. They had a promise that all the resources, all the authority and enablement of the Father was available to them if they would simply trust and obey.

Historically, we know that within a period of a few weeks they saw 5,000 come into a relationship with their Lord. Within 35 years they had planted churches in every major centre in the Roman Empire. They did it! They went out believing that it could be accomplished, and in the name and the authority of Jesus Christ they conquered the world. A little, insignificant group, but with all the power of a sovereign God available to them they accomplished what they were sent to do.

He also says in verse 20.... I am with you always..

What more do we need to gain confidence in the gospel of God and God of the gospel?]

Story of people in the slums of Nairobi and the confidence they have in God.

2. THE COMMISSION ALSO ADDRESSES THE CREDIBILITY QUESTION

Illustration: Radical Change in Eastern Europe

I heard how several years ago the Muslim populations in Albania and Serbia have been one of the most resistant groups to the Gospel. As the Muslim Kosovar refugees returned home from Albania to Serbia, “hundreds upon hundreds” of Serbian Muslims were coming to Christ. Why? The Albanian church—the church of the country of refuge—was demonstrating God’s love to its Muslim refugee neighbors. The demonstration of God’s love encouraged Muslims, who had never before considered Christ, to hear and accept the Gospel.

There are some credibility issues with the some of ways we have chosen to engage in mission:

- *Social gospel-Good works*
- *Dispensational-Lifeboat mentality-The world will only get worse*
- *Kingdom is future-Fire insurance*
- *Physical ministry as a means of evangelism-Manipulation*
- *Paternalism-Locals are unable to help themselves without help from outside*
- *Activism-Doing good stuff over there.. but really the motivation is about feeling good about ourselves*

Can our approach to mission stand the credibility test? Have we focused too much on numbers or techniques instead of authenticity and credibility? How do we develop a biblically based, theologically sound and relationally effective approach in order to bear witness to Christ effectively and meet human need? Discipleship is the key.

That major instruction is MAKE DISCIPLES!!

And “going” is not Jesus’ main instruction here. The instruction is to make disciples which is the only way to bring about sustainable and lasting change.

As we go about our lives as a student, teacher, mother, grandparent... our call is to make disciples. We can’t all GO..... but we can all make disciples, *if we are disciples ourselves!* Discipleship is a “radical abandonment to Christ”—an abandonment that means “giving up everything we have to follow Jesus”

Jesus’ model of making disciples was about *relationships* : God is a relational being – The Trinity..three beings in One who share each other’s life in perfect love. That means the Kingdom of God is all about loving relationships - to God and to others.

A true follower of Christ is one whose life bears the stamp of profound love relationships not merely a life of religious activity. When we reach out and express love to others we are reflecting the deepest reality of all - the very triune nature of God! That is what did God reveal when he sent Christ to earth. And that is what Jesus constantly modelled when he lived among us. Emulating God’s compassion must be at the heart of everything we do and it is fundamental to our understanding of meeting human need. And people are not projects... and God desires to transform them as indicated by the word.....**baptism** (identity) and **teaching** (grow into maturity) the means of making disciples. One of the things I have observed today is the level of biblical illiteracy but also a hesitation to learn or be taught. We think we know stuff. Disciples of Jesus are perpetual learners. We will be more credible if we engage in mission as learners instead of presenting as people who know everything.

Disciples are to be baptized into a Trinitarian understanding of God and relationship with him, and they are to be *taught to obey* implicitly whatever Messiah Jesus has taught us (now preserved in Scripture). Jesus’ disciples were trained not only in orthodoxy, the right doctrine, but also in orthopraxy, the right way of

doing or living. Peter was commended because of his orthodox confession of Jesus as the Messiah, but he was rebuked because of his misunderstanding of the cross as part of Christian orthopraxis (Matt. 16:15-23). So knowing stuff is great but that needs to be matched by living that stuff that we believe—being authentic disciples of Jesus.

God will put anyone to use who has the real thing, who has a quality of life that only a follower of Jesus Christ can have. I am convinced that people are looking for those who have the real thing. It is the only way we will ever reach this disillusioned generation today.

But how do we demonstrate God's love to unbelievers without compromising our identity? Jesus demonstrated that to be properly engaged to the world we must be both radically identified and yet radically different. Jesus moved into the neighborhood and we must follow his example. That is where disciple-making starts: by first prayerfully asking God "Show me where you are at work. Who are the people You are seeking to transform who are in my life already - in my neighborhood, in my work in my extended family?"

Let us go forth then remembering that disciple making is a **life** before it is a task; it is a question of being before it becomes an agenda of doing. Let us refuse to preach a gospel that promises so much and demands so little or one that offers NO hope!

We have been given an infinitely credible gospel – so let us be credible messengers who demonstrate not clever methodology but authenticity.

But how does being authentic disciples actually meet human need?

Illustration: How the Church Changed Ancient Rome²

*There are periods in Western history where God has used the church to transform society. One of the most dramatic examples is described in *The Rise of Christianity*, by Rodney Stark. Stark is an internationally recognized social scientist who specializes in the study of religious movements but as a biblical scholar. Instead, he applies theories and methods of social science to available historical data. The rise of Christianity, he notes, is the greatest social change in Western history in the last 2000 years. In this work, he examines how a tiny, persecuted, oppressed, rejected, reviled group of 120 people was able—within 300 years—to transform pagan Rome. (Acts 1:15)*

Stark says that living in Rome was not what people imagine when they hear about excavations of the forum and Pompeii, where the upper and middle classes lived. The poor lived in outlying areas in squalid, cramped quarters. It was so bad in their two-story ramshackle houses that people went home only when it was their turn to sleep. Sanitation was poor. There was no running water or toilets, and people threw human waste through their windows onto the streets. When severe illness came to those filthy, cramped quarters, it was likely that everyone would get sick. Epidemics claimed many lives.

Christianity stressed love and charity as central duties of faith. Yet, in times of raging epidemics, what difference would there be if Christians showed mercy and charity to the sick? Christians were not afraid to die; they knew that death was not the end and that made a huge difference in life expectancy. Meanwhile, Roman pagans—including doctors—had no reason to serve the sick. They fled infected cities whenever they could. Those who stayed took sick people outside and left them on the street, afraid of contamination.

As Christians we perhaps have embraced values and ideas that are not only unbiblical but that actually contradict the Gospel we claim to believe. The call is to live as disciples of Christ 24/7 and recover the missional dignity of ordinary life.

In this context of profound human need, a ministry which does not authentically address spiritual, physical and social needs misses the mark!

² Rise of Christianity: Rodney Stark

3. THE COMMISSION PROVIDES CLARITY WITH A FAR-REACHING SCOPE/SCALE

In our self-centered, self-reliant attitude that is pervasive in our culture, we need to have clarity regarding what God's call is for our lives. It is easy to be caught up in our own world and have a parochial, narrow view of life.

This commission is **for all nations**.

Where do you go or focus on in the task of MAKING DISCIPLES?

Two ways of classifying mission fields/ or strategic mission contexts

THE "MISSION FIELD" AS THE NEEDIEST:

THE 10 - 40 WINDOW: This is that section of the World that falls within Latitude 10, North of the equator, and latitude 40.

The Unreached People Groups Of The World : The 2nd great mission field defined by need is the unreached people groups of the world. 11,000 of these are considered unreached.

THE "MISSION FIELD" AS THE MOST STRATEGIC

But there are also other ways of looking at the mission field; other, possibly more strategic ways. Jn 9:4 *"The field is ripe with harvest for the harvest is plentiful but the labourers are few.*

In Mt 10 and Mk 6:6, Jesus sent out his disciples with clear instructions as to where to go and where to preach; and in so doing gave another way of defining the mission field *"Then Jesus went around teaching from village to village. 7 Calling the Twelve to him, he sent them out two by two and gave them authority over evil spirits. 8 11 And if any place will not welcome you or listen to you, shake the dust off your feet when you leave, as a testimony against them."* The criteria was on the basis of, not need, but receptivity. Go to those who are ready and receptive for the gospel. If we define the mission field this way, then there are 3 main fields or strategic mission contexts that we must go.

Where in the world are we to "go"?

A. The 4 – 14 Window :

Children are a receptive people group. Almost one third of the world's population, approximately 2.3 billion people, are under the age of 15.

Most of the world's children, 88% of under-18s, live in the less developed world.

Experts estimate that 1 billion children were born in the last decade and over 90% of them to mothers and fathers earning less than \$US1 a day. Extrapolating from population statistics, approximately 1 billion children live in parts of the world where they may never have heard of Jesus. Children are among the most marginalized, exploited, and suffering people groups in the world. Jesus had a very disturbing suggestion in Matthew 18:6, for those who cause any of the little ones who believe in him to sin.

Children are open to the Good News. Many Christian leaders today can point to an awakening to faith in their childhood.

Studies³ by the George Barna Research Group show that in the USA, the probability of someone coming to trust in Jesus is 32% for those between the ages of 5 and 12, but only 6% at age 19 or older. It seems that by age 13, one's spiritual identity is largely set in place. This is the basic premise of an idea called the "4/14 Window". Unofficial studies in many contexts strongly suggest that the openness of children to the Good News is present in cultures and societies around the world, regardless of religious or cultural background.

Any serious mission strategy will include careful and appropriate efforts to reach children and young people and disciple them for deep and long-lasting faith.

What would it look like for us to reach reach the 2.3 billion children of the world and help them to be Christ's disciples? What role are you, your student fellowship playing in this task? Teaching profession is becoming one of the greatest door openers in mission esp in creative access countries.

Jesuits have a saying: Give me the child until he is seven and I care not who has him thereafter."

Illustration: NZ. Children are also the best evangelists.

B. The Cities Of The World :

Paul's strategy was to go to the capital cities of his day and to preach the gospel first and foremost to the city centers and big business and agricultural cities like Ephesus, Corinth and Rome; and when he had done this, he could say I have completed the race, and Luke could say in Act's 19:10 " . . . *everyone in the province of Asia, both Jew and Gentile, heard the gospel*". God's strategy to focus on the cities is not new. Note that Jesus most significant ministry, & especially His death, were in the city; the church was born in a city; Paul's missionary strategy was to cities; the world will end in a city; and in these last days God is moving the end's of the earth into the city.

Surprisingly, the predominant mission model of the last century has been to go to the rural areas, and so much of the missionary effort in Africa is focused in the remote areas, and among unreached people groups, contrary to Paul's own strategy.

Why is this mission focus outdated? 29% of the World's population lived in cities in 1950.

By 1995 this had grown to 50%, and by 2025, it will be 75% of the World's population.

But in these cities are to be found all members of even the remotest unreached people groups of the world. And when people leave the rural area and move to the city, their secluded lifestyle, with all it's supporting plausibility structures, taboos and values, falls apart. To cope in the city, they must be open to new ideas, new ways, new lifestyles. People are most willing to change and examine their presumed world views; they are most vulnerable and yet most receptive when they have been removed from their comfort zones and are undergoing change. The City is also where many of the world's poor and destitute people live and places of greatest injustices- gap between the rich and the poor.

Some cities are particularly important to missions, as they are the "**Gateway Cities**" into a nation and unreached community, just as Wellington is a gateway city into New Zealand, although some people think it is Auckland. I think Wellington is more culture defining than Auckland. I stand to be corrected!

³ Spiritual Formation and Discipleship in Childhood. www.edinburgh2010.org/.../files/

C. Centres of power

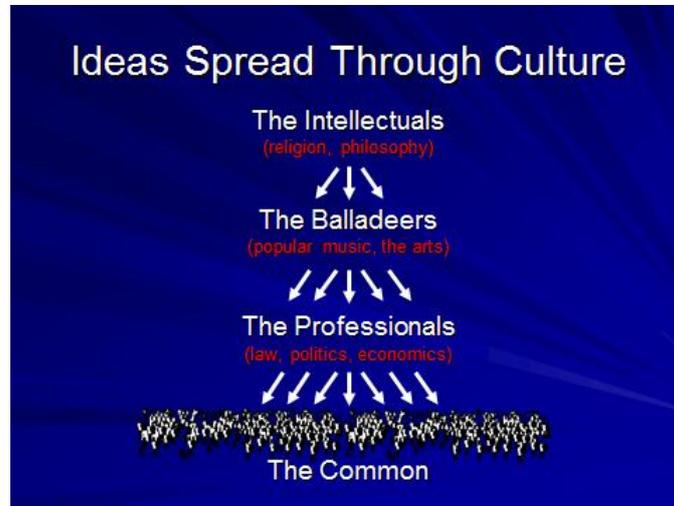
Illustration: How do you disciple a nation?⁴ Darryll Miller

Ideas spread around the world in 3 main ways in my view;

Horizontal: From one area to another

Temporal: From one generation to another

Vertical: Ideas diffuse into cultures through classes of people.



In Luke's account, Jesus says that "repentance and forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations" (24:47).

There is nothing wrong in thinking of our own community and finding ways to reach our own community. There are lost people right here in Wellington, we must not neglect them.

However, we also need to think of those abroad-The nations

We cannot allow our patriotism & love for this country to cloud our vision. We cannot believe that the lost in this country have any more value to God than the lost in any other nation.

The Lord Jesus died for all people, and we must take the Gospel to all people.

It's wonderful to be associated with a congregation that thinks globally.

The significance of Christ's choice of the word nations, rather than individuals or men is that the goal of the Great Commission is not just that a few individuals here and there are to be discipled but rather that eventually whole nations are to be brought under the subjection of Jesus Christ.

⁴ Ideas by Darryll Miller, Disciple Nations Alliance: www.disciplenations.org/

Wilberforce story:

There was a young man named William Wilberforce, he lived in England he was 21 years old when he ran for parliament in England he lived in the time of slavery, he ran for parliament at 21 the youngest you can enter parliament and he won the election, 3 years after he entered parliament the lord saved him, he is now 24 years old saved when he was 27 the Lord put a call upon his life and he wrote in this journal that the Lord is calling him to bring to bring an end to slavery in the British empire, imagine being a 27 year old and having a call of God to bring an end to slavery, so he gave a speech and he created a law, the law as soundly defeated, and he found himself standing against the political class, the economic class of people because all of their wealth was coming from the slave trade, he was standing against the leadership of his own party, he was standing virtually alone in parliament at 27 years old, to challenge the institution of slavery, 25 years later a law passed parliament, prohibiting the sale of slaves, but you could still own slaves you just could not sell them any longer he fought another almost for 25 years for forty six years he fought against slavery, 3 days before he died parliament passed a law emancipating slaves. One man who saw truth and justice changed the destiny of a nation and of the British Empire, one man. One man- discipling a Nation.

We need Wilberforces today who will engage the Centres of power in NZ and in other nations around the world where structural evil needs to be dealt with in order for justice to be done for the poor.

May be the scope of our dreams is too small. If we do not believe that we can carry out this Commission, there is no way we can carry it out. So we need:

- B- Big**
- H- Hairy**
- A - Audacious**
- G- Goals**

What's our response?

Note the Lord said we are to disciple all nations. To disciple the nations does not involve the sending of transcultural missionaries from a given center to the rest of the world. In our world of migrations, both forced and voluntary, the seed of the gospel is carried by disciples around the earth, and new missionary frontiers are opened up in the most unexpected places, both in the old missionary centers (Europe)or in islands of peripheries of the Christian world. That means that some will go, must go, to other lands. Some will remain to live and minister in the land of their birth, and to engage in the worldwide program of making disciples .

But again, what an exciting thing to know that we are engaged in an enterprise that is global in its scale; that God is at work in every corner of the world, to bring men into relationship with him. We are simply one segment, one part of what God is doing.

We need to have a vision of God's intentions for the community. Pray. Read. Survey community needs. Ask, "If Jesus were King in our community, what would it be like?"

God's call for us in a radically changing world is to be radical about His mission

Mission begins, exists and ends with the sovereign God of history, who invites us into his mission- We have a call to respond at this historic hour—as we...

GO ... Get out of our Comfort Zone

How?...

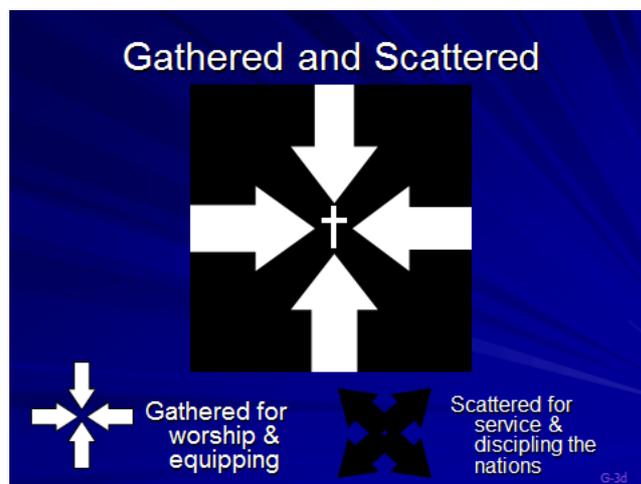
PRAY:

Prayer has such great power: Pray **for laborers/workers** to go into the vineyard: *“The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; therefore pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest”* (Mt 9:37-38).

The idea is **not** that we pray for the Lord to send out laborers while we sit at home and do nothing.

Obey:

- Aligning with others of same mind (Community). NZCMS provides a supporting community. Being connected to a Christian community is vital to nurturing a vision for global mission.



- Articulating a plan and a path to walk
- Reaching out HERE as a gracious welcomer
- Reflecting on your lifestyle and giving pattern- becoming a sacrificial sender/supporter
- Going...Short or long. Just have a go! Out of your comfort zone and on a mission!

Obedience is not⁵:

- “Where does God fit into the story of my life”, while we should be asking, “where do I fit into God’s great story of mission.”
- It’s not applying the Bible to our lives but applying our lives to God’s word, allowing His word to shape our lives.

⁵ Quotes by Chris Wright in Mission of God’s people

- It's not what kind of mission the church should do but what kind of church God expects for his mission in all its comprehensive fullness.
- Not what kind of mission God has for me but what kind of me God has for his mission.