

The Great Commission

Acts 28 – Matt 28

We have been doing a series through Acts, and we have come to the end. Acts 28. It's taken us over 6 months. In reality the book of Acts was spread over 30 years. The book of Acts was an amazing ride through good times and bad times of a young and growing church. This young church, to everyone amazement, begun to spread throughout the world, but it wasn't easy at all.

These stories in the book of Acts are our roots, our church roots. It's a good thing to know that our faith is not just someone's good idea, a recent development, but rather our faith is historically informed and rooted deeply, in not just the last 2,000 years, but actually going back to the creation of all things.

In this last chapter of the book, Acts 28, it concludes Paul's journey to Rome, where Paul would eventually die. And the last thing that Luke records is

³⁰ For the next two years, Paul lived in Rome at his own expense. He welcomed all who visited him, ³¹ boldly proclaiming the Kingdom of God and teaching about the Lord Jesus Christ. And no one tried to stop him.

Matthew 28

That's how Acts finishes, however I want to finish our series on the book of Acts in the book of Matthew. If that seems strange to you, I hope it isn't if you stop to think about it. We're going to look at why Paul concluded the way he did, why the book of Acts was written, and that is because of the Great Commission or what Christ calls his people or his church to do.

What I want to do is I want us to read the Great Commission. And that is found not in Acts 28 but **Matthew 28**, starting in verse 18. This is the resurrected Jesus speaking. He has been crucified, was in the ground for three days, was resurrected, and since then had been catching up with a few of his mates.

Here's what it says.

"And Jesus came and said to them, 'All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.'"

If someone said this in my presence I would tend to raise my eyebrows and this really!! I think we have a nutter on our hands, however, this from the man who

has beaten death. This from the man who told a storm to stop storming and it listened.

Even knowing that, this would still be one of the more puzzling statements in Scripture. What in the world is Jesus saying when he says, “All authority has been given to me?” “Given”?

How can the Son of God be “given” anything? Being God, surely He already had it? But Jesus says it’s been given to him. By whom? Why? For what purpose? And what does that have to do with us? Why is this good news?

This is very relevant as we come up to Christmas. John 1 says “The Word became flesh, and dwelt among us.”

But why? **It’s God’s big rescue mission.** Let me explain.

Remember back in the creation account, Genesis 1, **God created humanity in his own image and gave us dominion or authority, over all the earth.** So we had God-given authority to act, the earth was ours to rule, as God’s stewards, his managers and caretakers, with the proviso that we listen to his voice and do his will.

But that all fell to pieces when we stopped listening. Mankind decided we wanted to be our own god, making our own decisions about right and wrong, not listening to what God had said. Being a steward wasn’t good enough. We wanted to be the boss. Independent, free from God. Not humbly receiving authority given by God. That desire for power, independence of God—that is what sin is. And it brought some significant consequences.

Authority squandered and ruined. That’s the story of mankind.

But Christ brings his story into ours. His story enters into, and changes, human history. It’s the big rescue mission. The Son of God comes down to earth and becomes one of us. There will be a man who gets it right. It is Jesus Christ, God in the flesh.

Christ’s completion of the rescue mission has absolutely wonderful consequences! Death has been destroyed. Sins are forgiven, all of them. Now we are free to live as God’s children. We have the Spirit now, we are new people.

And so that is the context that Jesus says, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.”

Crucified and raised, seated at the right hand of God. The course of history is in his hands. Your own personal story is in his hands. Jesus has all authority. He has authority to forgive sins. He has authority over death. He has authority to give life.

Let's continue on through the great commission

"And Jesus came and said to them, 'All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples...'"

This is God saying, "I do have a purpose for you." This is God saying, "I have uniquely designed you, I have uniquely placed you..... so go." And do what? "Make disciples."

Here is what we must know. He didn't say, "Go and make converts." He said, "Go and make disciples. Go and make followers ..." The goal of our going is not just to have people who say, "Yeah, I believe in Jesus, and pray the sinners prayer" but rather have people who, by their lives, follow him.

"All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age."

Notice that Jesus bracketed the Great Commission. He says, "**All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.**" Then he lays out these commands. And then at the end, he goes, "**And I'm going with you.** I'm not sending you out to accomplish this on your own. I'm going with you. You're going to need to remember that I'm going with you because there will be days that it's difficult. There will be days that it's costly. There will be days that you want to shrink back. There will be days you just want to hide. But just know that I'm with you, and all authority is mine."

This is where Christian confidence or fearlessness should take root in the heart of every believer. He's with us.

Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, he's with us. He's always there, so there should always be confidence in the Great Mission to go and make disciples of all nations because he's always with us, and all authority is his.

The title of this series has been 'Acts – a church on a mission'. The commission that empowered the early church back then is still applicable to us today and so I want to look at what this means for us; "All authority has been given to Christ. Go therefore and make disciples." This is the essence of what God has called us to.

I want us to look at this call at a personal level, what this should look like for us as Christian individuals. Then I want us to briefly look at this at a church level.

Let's start at **the personal level**. This is you living your life, day in and day out, alarm going off at 6:00 in the morning, or whenever you get up. You get your cup of coffee, a piece of toast or couple of weetbix. Then getting in your car, heading to work, working hard at work, and then back home. In the midst of all of that, in the daily routine of life, **how are we to live to fulfil God's great commission?**

I think one of them is a no-brainer. You know I'm going to say that word....**evangelism**. We'll get to that one a bit later, but let me tell you a word which I think proceeds it and might be just as important.

1. Hospitality

Repeatedly throughout the Old and New Testament, the followers of Christ are commanded to be hospitable, to show hospitality. I think Alison Holst, followed by a heap of other cooks and now made worse by MasterChef, have hijacked this word from us, because at one time *hospitality* had this really deep-rooted meaning of loving and caring for people. Now, I feel like it's a dinner party.

Hospitality in the Bible, it's so much more. Yes, it usually includes food, but it is not just a dinner party. Hospitality, biblically speaking, is loving strangers, treating fellow believers, widows, orphans, unbelievers, the poor and needy, foreigners, immigrants and refugees, even your own enemies, as though they were your family. That's hospitality. Hospitality is to walk alongside people for an extended period of time, so the glory of Christ might be seen and embraced by them.

Hospitality is an openness to share our lives. When Christians walk with genuine, gospel-centred hospitality, none of the labels the secular world wants to lay on us, like hypocritical, insensitive, judgemental, have a chance at sticking. When we don't walk with genuine hospitality, they all do.

I am encouraged and challenged by many of you who are doing such a great job of this. My kids challenge me in the way they are serving the community where they live in Auckland. I am encouraged by those who are volunteering for pregnancy choice, good neighbour, working with immigrants, the disabled, saying no to violence.

We have just started with a small group of people who are beginning to walk alongside an organization called fresh perspectives which walks with people/families who need a bit of support as they go through a crisis. If you want to be involved in this area talk to Matt. That is hospitality, but it's not a dinner party. It's what God has called us into because God has been unbelievably hospitable to us.

How do we walk in the Great Commission as the people of God? We show hospitality. We give to the poor without any expectation of repayment. We treat families, refugees, enemies, immigrants as though they were our own family. We do so because the gospel called us to it.

2. Share our story

The second thing (and I won't spend hardly any time at all on this) is we share our story. We evangelize. I feel like there is so much anxiety around this. It's not complex. You don't have to be offensive. It's, "How can I pray for you?" "But I don't really believe in God." "I'm not asking you to believe in God. I just want to know how I can pray for you."

And then if they say 'sure', and most of the time they do, and they say "I have this situation at work. My wife and I... Here is the difficulty we're in. I have a kid who has lost his way. Will you just pray for me?" Then pray. And then later come back and go, "I've been praying. How are things going? As I was praying for you, this verse from our Bible came to mind, or this thought. Here, I just thought it would encourage you."

The next thing you know, you are in a conversation about God with someone. "What does that mean? How does that work?" It can be that simple. Share your story with people. Evangelism.

3. Faithful presence

The first way we live out the Great commission at a personal level is you *show hospitality*. Second way is you *share your story*. Then the third way we will call *faithful presence*. Let me try and explain.

There is this old story of a new Christian convert coming to Martin Luther, he is the father of the Great Reformation, he was around in the 14-1500's. This new Christian comes to Luther and says, "Hey, I have just become a Christian. How am I to faithfully serve the Lord?" Luther asked him, "Well, what do you do?" He said, "I'm a cobbler. I make shoes," to which Luther said, "Then make a great shoe and sell it at a fair price."

Faithfully serving the Lord isn't about stopping making shoes and going to Bible College. (Although it might be for some). Serving God faithfully is about making the best shoe you can and selling it for a fair price. Faithful presence is us, as men and women, fulfilling our God-given obligation to work hard, to seek to serve all, and to walk the talk in a type of humility that is attractive to the world.

All your evangelism and all your hospitality, vanishes the second you are lazy at work. If you're the guy who doesn't finish his projects, the guy who doesn't turn anything in on time, the woman who is constantly late to meetings, all your hospitality and sharing the gospel vanishes if you're the guy or girl at work who everybody has to work around because you're unreliable.

What is faithful presence? Make a good shoe and sell it for a fair price. Teach as well as you can. Repair things to the best of your ability. Sell things as ethically as possible. Don't take advantage of the poor. Work hard. Encourage your boss. This is how we fulfil the great commission at a personal level.

At the church level, we've also tried to structure ourselves to work toward filling the great commission. We call this being a missional church.

Let me very quickly tell you how we try to fulfil the great commission as a church.

We try to keep it simple, we try to do what we do well but keep it simple.

- We try not to have too many church programmes or activities so that we have time to get out there in the community, to be hospitable with our neighbours, to be involved with the community, giving opportunities to tell our stories.
- We take our discipleship responsibilities seriously and recruit the best leaders we can to help make disciples of our children and youth and equip parents.

- We try to keep church simple to keep our running costs down, to free up money to use for missional activities. We give quite a bit of what comes in away. It goes to fight social injustice, it goes to local church-planting, it goes to missionaries, and it goes to overseas church planters, and it goes to local ministries, we support the Paines as they work at food rescue, we support cool bananas as they work in schools, we support foodbank that helps the needy.
- it goes around the world to make a difference in the world. We support people working overseas in a variety of places Julie, Phams, Staintons, Sukhen, Tuktar, Freeset, schools in BD.
- It was exciting to see the Staintons go out earlier this year – whose next?

"All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age."