

# Trinity Presbyterian Core Group

## Lesson 6 – The great Commission: How has God called us to reach out to the world?

### Intro

- We have been discussing how God has designed the church to feed and care for His sheep. But He also calls His church to be His ambassadors to this world.
- How should we understand and carry out this commission He has given us?

### Ambassadors?

- Ambassadors live in another country and live as obedient citizens in it, but possess a true citizenship from another country. And their ultimate allegiance is to that country.

#### **Heb 11:13-16**

And they admitted that they were aliens and strangers on earth. <sup>14</sup> People who say such things show that they are looking for a country of their own. <sup>15</sup> If they had been thinking of the country they had left, they would have had opportunity to return. <sup>16</sup> Instead, they were longing for a better country--a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared a city for them.

#### **2 Cor 5:17-21**

<sup>17</sup> Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come! <sup>18</sup> All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: <sup>19</sup> that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. <sup>20</sup> **We are therefore Christ's ambassadors**, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God. <sup>21</sup> God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

- Their whole reason for being in the foreign country is to promote the business and plans of their true home.
- But they will ruin the chances of doing so, if they are poor citizens in their visiting country.
- The way that the Bible seems to split these two concerns that we have is by commissioning us to be **Heralds** and **Servants**

### Heralds?

- When Scripture talks about spreading the gospel it almost always uses the Greek word *kerux*, or “herald”.

- Often this word is translated as “preach” but this can be misleading since in our culture we often do not distinguish between preaching and teaching.

### **Thayer’s Greek Lexicon**

**κἠρῦξ** (*kerux*): a herald, a messenger vested with public authority, who conveyed the official messages of kings, magistrates, princes, military commanders, or who gave a public summons or demand, and performed various other duties.<sup>1</sup>

- But heralding is announcing, proclaiming.
- So we proclaim or announce the news of what our heavenly “sending” country is about.

### **Servants?**

- But as citizens of this world, our temporary country, we are called to be servants of all.
- I know that we most often associate our calling in the world with words like “dominion”
- But that language is altogether absent from the NT
- The words most used of our calling to the world there is “Servant”. And this servant hood is actually born out of the freedom that he has won for us in Christ.
- This is exactly what Paul meant when he was exhorting the Galatians to live in light of the freedom that Christ won for them in the Gospel:

#### **Gal 5:13-14**

<sup>13</sup> You, my brothers, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the sinful nature; rather, serve one another in love. <sup>14</sup> The entire law is summed up in a single command: "Love your neighbor as yourself."

- Luther helpfully shows us what an amazing work God has accomplished. He has freed us *from* sin and death, and simultaneously freed us *to* serve out of joy and gratitude.

### **Martin Luther**

I shall set down the following two propositions concerning freedom and bondage of the Spirit:

A Christian is a perfectly free lord of all, subject to none.

A Christian is a perfectly dutiful servant of all, subject to all.

These two theses seem to contradict one another. If, however, they should be found to fit together they would serve our purpose beautifully. Both are Paul’s own statements, who says in **1 Cor 9:19** “For though I am free from all men, I have made myself a slave to all,” and in Rom 13:8, “Owe no man anything except to love one another.” Love by its very nature is ready to serve and be subject to him who is loved.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Thayer’s Greek English Lexicon of the New Testament, 2948.

<sup>2</sup> Martin Luther, “The Freedom of a Christian”, in *Luther’s Works*, Vol 31, *Career of the Reformer I*, trans. W. A. Lambert, (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1957) 344.

- God has called us to live and work here, but he has called us to put our hope in the “better country” that he spoke of in Hebrews.
- This hope is not dependent on our performance now, but has been guaranteed for us by the finished work of Christ on our behalf.
- If we do not constantly keep this in mind, we will always be tempted to put our hope in what **we** can accomplish this side of heaven.
- We quickly become those who forget our need for grace and become self-righteous
- Or we become those who claw and grasp for everything right here and now and refuse to love and serve our neighbor.
- We can love and serve now with hope evident to all if and only if we constantly return to Paul’s summary of the Christian life:

**Rom 12:1-2**

Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God--this is your spiritual act of worship. Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind.

- So then, as Christ’s ambassadors, we are representatives of the Kingdom of God, but living in the Kingdom of Man. Our ultimate citizenship is in heaven, but we live as citizens on earth so that we can promote the business of our sending country.

### **What is the Great Commission?**

**Mat 28:18-20**

<sup>18</sup> Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. <sup>19</sup> 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, <sup>20</sup> and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."

#### **1. Go Make Disciples/Preach the Gospel**

- How do we make disciples? By preaching the good news.

**Mar 16:15-16**

<sup>15</sup> He said to them, "Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation.

<sup>16</sup> Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned.

- In **Rom 10:9-15**, Paul describes the following as:

<sup>9</sup> That if you confess with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. <sup>10</sup> For it is with your heart that you

believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved.<sup>11</sup> As the Scripture says, "Anyone who trusts in him will never be put to shame."<sup>12</sup> For there is no difference between Jew and Gentile--the same Lord is Lord of all and richly blesses all who call on him,<sup>13</sup> for, "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved."<sup>14</sup> How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them?<sup>15</sup> And how can they preach unless they are sent? As it is written, "How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!"

### **What then is the Gospel?**

- It is the good news of the finished work of Christ on our behalf. It is the reality of Christ crucified, contrary to the advice, and wisdom of the world

#### **1 Cor 2:1-5**

When I came to you, brothers, I did not come with eloquence or superior wisdom as I proclaimed to you the testimony about God.<sup>2</sup> For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified.<sup>3</sup> I came to you in weakness and fear, and with much trembling.<sup>4</sup> My message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit's power,<sup>5</sup> so that your faith might not rest on men's wisdom, but on God's power.

### **The Gospel is NOT...**

- a. The Gospel is NOT: Preaching a message about ourselves, but about the finished work of Christ.
  - o As Paul argued, "For we do not preach ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, and ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake." (**2 Cor 4:5**)

#### **Michael Horton**

The gospel that we preach is good news because it is not the story of our discipleship, but of Christ's obedience, death, and resurrection in our place. The good news is not, "Look at my life" or "look at our community"; it is the announcement that in Christ God justifies the wicked. Yes, there is hypocrisy, and because Christians will always be simultaneously saint and sinner, there will always be hypocrisy in every Christian and in every church. The good news is that Christ saves us from hypocrisy, too. But hypocrisy is especially generated when the church points to itself and to our own "changed lives" in its promotional materials. The more we talk about ourselves, the more occasion the world will have to charge us with hypocrisy. The more we confess our sins and receive forgiveness, and pass this good news on to others, the more our lives will be authentically changed in the bargain.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Michael Horton, *Modern Reformation*, Issue: "Christless Christianity", (May/June, Vol. 16 No. 3, 2007), p. 10-16.

- b. The Gospel is NOT: Something that we *do*; rather, it is a message that we *proclaim*.
- Christ “did” the Gospel and we tell people what His accomplishment means for them.
  - But our lives lived in response to the gospel *do not become the good news*; we simply report it. This is what led to Paul’s description above in Rom 10

**Rom 10:2-9**

<sup>2</sup> For I can testify about them that they are zealous for God, but their zeal is not based on knowledge. <sup>3</sup> Since they did not know the righteousness that comes from God and sought to establish their own, they did not submit to God's righteousness. <sup>4</sup> Christ is the end of the law so that there may be righteousness for everyone who believes. <sup>5</sup> Moses describes in this way the righteousness that is by the law: "The man who does these things will live by them." <sup>6</sup> But the righteousness that is by faith says: "Do not say in your heart, 'Who will ascend into heaven?' " (that is, to bring Christ down) <sup>7</sup> "or 'Who will descend into the deep?' " (that is, to bring Christ up from the dead). <sup>8</sup> But what does it say? "The word is near you; it is in your mouth and in your heart," that is, the word of faith we are proclaiming: <sup>9</sup> That if you confess with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.

- It has been said (though no one has ever found a real citation) that St. Francis of Assisi supposedly taught: “Preach the Gospel at all times; if necessary use words.”
- But this is like saying, “Feed the hungry; if necessary use food.”

**Michael Horton**

With all due respect to St. Francis, the gospel is only something that can be *told* (i.e., words), a story that can be declared. When our lives are told within that larger story, rather than vice versa, there is genuine salvation for sinners and mission to the world.<sup>4</sup>

- So we don’t bring Christ down from heaven, or raise Him up: He has accomplished salvation once for all time and sat down because it was completed. We, in turn, tell others that the victory has been won, *by Him for us*.
- c. The Gospel is NOT: A plan of moral or social reform.
- While wonderful moral and social reforms result from the Gospel being embraced, these are not themselves the Gospel. Confusing the results with the cause can have dire effects, and Scripture warns us not to:

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<sup>4</sup> Horton, "Christless Christianity," 16.

### **Ephesians 6:10-12**

<sup>10</sup> Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. <sup>11</sup> Put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes. <sup>12</sup> For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.

## **2. Baptize**

- This shows that the Great Commission is about more than simply getting the message out. It is about bringing people into the visible AND invisible church and not simply invisible alone.
- Baptism is the visible marker of the New Covenant people of God and, as such, is a sign that He has placed them in a covenant that doesn't function apart from the visible Church.
- It assumes that there are those with authority in place who are both performing the sign and watching over those who receive it.
- This means that the Great Commission is fundamentally about church planting and continual feeding through those churches; it is not simply about general "Christian" activity in the world.

## **3. Teach**

- Recall again that **Mat 28:19-20** said to "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."
- Those being taught here refers to those the church has already preached to, baptized and made disciples. Thus the "them" who are being taught are the same "them" who have been baptized.<sup>5</sup>
- So this is *not* a command to go teach the nations how to behave in addition to the commands to evangelize and baptize. Rather, this command describes what is to go on *within the church* for those who have already been baptized and made disciples.

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<sup>5</sup> The following scholars all share this interpretation. John Nolland, *The Gospel of Matthew: New International Greek Testament Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 1265-1272; D. A. Carson, *Matthew: Expositor's Bible Commentary*, vol. 9 revised ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010), 667-669; David L. Turner, *Matthew: Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008), 689-690; Craig S. Keener, *A Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 719-720; R. T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew: New International Commentary on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 1115-1119; Donald A. Hagner, *Matthew 14-28: Word Biblical Commentary*, vol. 33 b (Dallas, TX: Word, 1995), 886-889.

- So this continues to develop the idea of the commission being about growing the church: by preaching the Gospel to the world, initiating those who believe into the church, and then teaching the church what it means to live in light of the Gospel.

**To whom is the Great Commission given?**

- To the Church alone.
- God has not called nor authorized any other earthly institution to do this. It is up to the church to evangelize the world.
- Every other societal institution has a different calling and design. This is why Paul is so impassioned in His plea:

**Rom 10:14-15**

How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them? <sup>15</sup> And how can they preach unless they are sent? As it is written, "How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!"