

Theme: - The greatness of God/God's great commission

The theme is the greatness of God, but these four verses are also known as the great commission, that is, we are to pass our faith in the gospel of Christ on to the next generation.

The truth is of course that all four gospels, Matthew, mark, Luke, and John together make up the gospel of Christ albeit from different viewpoints. However, what is the same in all four gospels is the explicit commission to spread the gospel of Christ to the ends of the earth and make disciples of all nations.

Now verse 16 tells us that only eleven Apostles went to Galilee, this was because Judas Iscariot in his remorse for what he had done in betraying Jesus had committed suicide. Verse 16 starts by reminding us that Judas realising that he had condemned the Son of God, hanged himself, so the great commission fell initially on the eleven Apostles. But St Luke in his book of Acts tells us in chapter 1 that the eleven Apostles went back to the room where they were staying, and it wasn't very long before Matthias was selected to replace Judas as the twelfth Apostle.

We are told in verse 1 of chapter 28 that Mary Magdalene and the other Mary had visited Jesus' tomb and when they got there, there was a violent earthquake. They were then confronted with an angel who told them that Jesus had been raised from the dead, and that he was going ahead of them to Galilee where they will see him. Then Mary Magdalene and the other Mary, when returning to the Apostles to give them the news, saw Jesus who had been raised from the dead, who asked them to tell his disciples that they would see him in Galilee. So now the message that the two women were taking to the Apostles was no longer their message but Jesus' message.

However, in verse 16 we are told by Matthew that Jesus had subsequently directed them to the mountain in Galilee. Mountains were important to Matthew, the sermon on the mount, the mountain of transfiguration, and now a mountain in Galilee, which could have been mount Tabor, although there are others in that region, but the Apostles clearly knew which one.

Now we need to pause here for a moment to remember that Israel in Jesus' day was male dominated; women had virtually no status, and it was usual for a man to give instructions to women not the other way round. But here we have Jesus changing the order of things, here Jesus had two women telling the Apostles, firstly that a miracle had happened, that Jesus had risen from the dead, not a normal thing to happen, and also telling them to go to Galilee, a distance of 60 miles if indeed it was mount Tabor they had to go to.

It was a great leap of faith for the Apostles to accept the extraordinary news that Jesus had risen from the dead, and to set out on the journey to Galilee on the say so of women. But in the women's favour there were two of them who claimed to have seen Jesus, and two witnesses made the news acceptable, and the Apostles knew them to be devote followers of Jesus who could be relied on.

We now come to verse 17 which tells us that when the disciples saw Jesus they worshipped him. Now we should not be surprised at their reaction of worship; they knew that he had died

and had been put in a tomb. They knew that Good Friday appeared to be the end of Jesus and his ministry. But now they see Jesus, and all the things he had been telling them suddenly made sense, confirming beyond doubt that he was the Messiah, and in the light of all that, worship was the only logical step to take.

Earlier, as recorded in Luke 16:31 Jesus said, “If they do not listen to Moses and the prophets, neither will they be convinced even if someone rises from the dead.” Now some of Jesus’ own Apostles are experiencing some doubt or hesitation as they see Jesus who was raised from the dead. I can understand that because nothing in their experience had prepared them for what they were seeing, except the resurrection of Lazarus, which those who doubted may not have heard of, and it wasn’t reported in Matthew’s gospel.

We are told in the book of Daniel at chapter 7 these words, “To him was given dominion and glory and kingship, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that shall not pass away, and his kingship is one that shall never be destroyed.” Earlier in chapter 11 at verse 27 Matthew recorded these words of Jesus, “All things have been delivered to me by my Father.” Now in verse 18 Jesus claims, “All authority has been given to me in heaven and on earth.”

Now this wasn’t the first time that he had been promised the world. In chapter 4 of Matthew’s gospel, we are told in verses 8 that the devil took him to a very high mountain, another of Matthew’s mountains, and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and the devil said to Jesus I will give all these to you if you fall down and worship me. But Jesus turned to him and said, ‘Away with you, for it is written, “Worship the Lord your God and serve only him.”’

Verse 18 starts, “Then Jesus came.” The disciples in their various stages of belief and unbelief were probably riveted to the spot in astonishment at seeing Jesus, so Jesus went to them and told them what can only be described as an extraordinary statement that Jesus now has all authority in heaven and on earth; but this time the gift came from God.

When I think of the power that some national leaders have and the misery they cause their own people and the peoples of other countries around them, and what it would be like if they had even more power, is downright frightening. But Jesus knows us all by name, cares for all of us, and loves all of us and indeed died for all of us; knowing that he has full authority on earth and in heaven, is the ultimate good news, the best news possible, news that cannot be surpassed. And regarding Christ’s love for us we need to remember; that there is nothing we can say or do or be that will make Christ love us more, than he loves us at the moment.

When things go wrong, or when you are sad or lonely, and want someone to talk to or be with, remember that Jesus loves you and is always available for you to turn to, and he will put all things right, and give you joy and peace. Christ is in charge, we have many serious problems at the moment, we have wars, and we have disasters due to climate change. We will not solve any of these problems on our own, we need to ask for Christ’s help through prayer because he has authority over heaven and earth and through him and only through him will our problems be solved.

Verse 19 starts, Go therefore and make disciples of all nations. That is our commission we are to make disciples of all nations. The second part of verse 19 and the first part of verse 20

tells us how to make disciples, we are to baptise them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit; and then teach them to obey everything that I have commanded you. A disciple then is a baptised person who not only wants to learn about the Christian faith, but also wants to live it and pass it on to the next generation, because Jesus' commission is a command for action.

In the past 2,000 years we have been successful in making disciples. On the internet there is an estimate that the number of Christians worldwide is now 2.3 Billion people about one third of the world's population. On average over the last 2,000 years there have been 1.1 million people accepting Christ as their Lord and saviour each year, and it started with just 11 Apostles.

But it is the future we have to concentrate on, because God has decided to redeem the world through our Lord Jesus Christ and bearing that in mind we have a duty to proclaim the gospel in our generation; Christianity is essentially a living religion which continually needs new disciples. Now although Jesus said go and make disciples of all nations, we need to remember that it was without doubt the work of the Holy Spirit within us which made it possible. Without the Holy Spirit there would be no Christianity today, the Holy Spirit is the powerhouse of the Christian faith.

Finally, the last sentence tells us that Christ will be with us to the end of the age, which will be when he comes back, not as a baby but as king of the universe. But until then we all have a friend we can turn to whenever we want to, a friend who we can share our problems and joys with, and when we feel sad or lonely we can turn to him, and Christ will comfort us and give us peace. Christ has all authority over heaven and earth, but he is still the best friend we shall ever have who loves us beyond our belief.

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