

## Session 1

April 25, 2021

### OUR COMMISSION

#### Matthew 28:18-20; 2 Corinthians 5:16-21

When I was growing up, I was taught the Great Commission was lifestyle-based. The Bible word for “go” is a participle, so the best translation for Matthew 28:19, I was taught, is “as you are going...” Unfortunately, the unintended consequence was sort of a lackadaisical approach to evangelism and missions that said, “As you are going about your business, if you get the chance, you ought to consider mentioning Christ.” But while the word is indeed a participle, it has an *imperative* force. In other words, the going part is *assumed*. Hence “Go” is both a command and a continued action. And that makes perfect sense: “Go and make disciples...and as you are going make disciples.” Our focal texts this week remind us of the seriousness of our calling. Three key principles are mentioned.

**Commission (Matt. 28:18-20).** In these final words of Jesus’ earthly life, the Lord answered the question that was no-doubt on the disciples’ minds: “Where do we go from here?” Three elements are present. First, notice *His power* (v. 18). The newer translations more correctly translate the word as *authority*. Certainly, as divine, Jesus is omnipotent in His power. But more than that, Jesus—by virtue of His obedience to the Father and atoning sacrifice for His children—has the authority to command His followers. Second, we see *His plan* (vv. 19-20). The commission involves making disciples (converting the lost into followers of Christ); baptizing them (which publicly declares their professions of faith as Christ followers); and teaching them that which He commanded (the obedience both sanctifying the new believers and multiplying the host of Kingdom workers). Finally, there is *His presence* (v. 20). The emphasis here is *personal* (“I am with you”); on *perpetuity* (literally, “all the time”); and on *permanence* (even “to the end”). For reflection: *In the context, do you believe this Great Commission is given to individuals or to the church? Why?*

**Transformation (2 Cor. 5:16-18).** In the previous verses, Paul reminded the church that the “love of Christ constrains us” to fulfill our Christian duties. It is through His eyes that we now see others, not simply looking on their outward appearance, but at their spiritual need. I often tell my students the importance of being “soul conscious;” that is, getting into the habit of looking at people from the perspective of “saved” versus “not saved” rather than ranking them by appearance or position. Verse 17 is iconic. It demonstrates the perspective Christ has when looking at us and challenges us to use that same perspective when judging others. I remember well making an evangelistic visit with a new deacon by my side. When the door of the home opened, the prospect recognized my new deacon from their old drinking days decades before. He took great pleasure in recounting all they “used to do.” My deacon listened politely, then nodded and smiled. “You are right, my friend,” he replied. “That’s the way I *used* to be. But I’ve been changed.” Verse 18 then passes the mantle on to us. Because we have been *reconciled* (literally, “restored” or “set right”), we are in the position to help others do the same. For reflection: *Why do you think Paul used the phrase “ministry” of reconciliation? What do you think he means by that?*

**Representation (2 Cor. 5:19-21).** Verses 19 and 20 continue the thought of the previous verses. It was God who did the reconciliation (not us!). It was accomplished through Christ (not through works!). Since we received the benefits of reconciliation (our salvation!), we have been entrusted with the *message* of reconciliation (the gospel!). Verse 21 is one of the clearest statements in Scripture regarding Christ's atonement. In theology, we use the terms *penal*, which relates to the *penalty* of sin, and *substitutionary* which indicates that Christ died in our place. Verse 21 teaches both truths: sinless Christ took on our sin (and hence, the penalty for it), and died the death that we deserve! And that is the message of reconciliation. For reflection: *Why do you think it was necessary for Christ to die on our behalf? Did He really pay the penalty for our sin? How do you know?*