

**The Great Commission According To Matthew's Gospel Accompanied by Insights
From The Life and Writings Of William Carey With the Goal of A Passionate
Global Vision For Our Seminary**

Matthew 28:16-20

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**The Great Commission...William Carey...A Passionate Global Vision
Matthew 28:16-20**

Introduction: 1) He may have been the greatest missionary since the time of the apostles. He rightly deserves the honor of being known as “the father of the modern missions movement.” William Carey was born in 1761 and died in 1834. He left England in 1793 as a missionary to India. He would never return home again. He was poor with only a grammar school education, and yet he would translate the Bible into dozens of languages and dialects, and he established schools and mission stations all over India. I love Timothy George’s description of what he calls this “lone, little man.” His resume: education, minimal; degrees, none; savings, depleted; political influence, nil; references, a band of country preachers half a world away. What are his resources? A weapon: love; a desire: to bring the light of God into the darkness; a strategy: to proclaim by life, lips, and letters the unsearchable riches of Christ” (George, 93).

William Carey got Matthew 28:16-20. It was his farewell text to his church at Harvey Lane before departing to India. Rebuked earlier by the respected minister John Ryland Sr. with his now infamous words, “Young man sit down. When God pleases to convert the heathen, He will do without your aid or mine” (George, 53), Carey was undeterred. He would powerfully proclaim “expect great things. Attempt great things.” Later tradition would add “from God” and “for God” (George, 32), though this is undoubtedly what he meant. He would publish his famous *An Enquiry into the Obligations of Christians to Use Means for the Conversion of the Heathens* (1792). Here he would pen searing words for the Church of his day as well as our own. Commenting on the Great Commission text before us he wrote,

This commission was as extensive as possible, and laid them under obligation to disperse themselves into every country to the habitable globe, and preach to all the inhabitants, without exception, or limitation. They accordingly went forth in obedience to the command, and the power of God evidently wrought with them. Many attempts of the same kind have been made since their day, and which have been attended with various success; but the work has not been taken up, or prosecuted of late years (except by a few individuals) with that zeal and perseverance with which the primitive Christians went about it. It seems as if many thought the commission was sufficiently put in execution by what the apostles and others have done; that we have enough to do to attend to the salvation of our own countrymen; and that, if God intends the salvation of the heathen, he will some way or other bring them to the gospel, or the gospel to them. It is thus that multitudes sit at ease, and give themselves no concern about the far greater part of their fellow sinners, who to this day, are lost in ignorance and idolatry. (Sec.1)

Later he would add, “I question whether all are justified in staying here, while so many are perishing without means of grace in other lands.” (sec. 50).

2) These verses in Matthew constitute the last words of Jesus in this gospel. They are intended to be lasting words, and the final marching orders for Christ’s followers until He returns. Adrian Rogers says here we find “the heartbeat of the Son of God.” Here we are told that, “We are all to bring all men by all means to Jesus by any cost.”

I. Acknowledge He Has All Power. 28:16-18

- The eleven disciples minus Judas go north to Galilee “to the mountain where Jesus had told them to go” (*NIV*). The scene is reminiscent of the setting of the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5:1). It is interesting to note that the climatic temptation (Matt 4:8-11), the Sermon on the Mount (Matt 5-7), the Transfiguration (Matt 17:1), the Olivet Discourse prophecy (Matt 24-25) and now the Great Commission of the Great King all took place on a mountain.
- Suddenly they see the resurrected, risen Lord. What transpires is instructive for our careful consideration and response.

1) Worship Him. 28:17

Seeing Him they worship, but some, amazingly, doubt.

-Doubt as to should they worship this man? Perhaps.

-Doubt as to confusion about the whole thing? Perhaps.

-Doubt because they did not know how to respond given their past failures and track record? Almost certainly.

And yet worship, even in the midst of doubt, is the wise and right thing to do.

-Do I understand all He is doing in my life? Worship.

-Am I confused, unsure, hesitating? Worship.

-Am I sorrowful, heart broken, crushed? Worship.

-Am I discouraged, depressed, in utter despair? At death's door? Worship!

*On his deathbed Carey breathed to the Scottish missionary Alexander Duff,
 "When I am gone, say nothing about Dr. Carey. Speak about Dr. Carey's Savior"
 (George, xii). He is the Savior, so worship Him.

2) **Hear Him. 28:18**

"All" (4X) authority is mine, in heaven and on earth. Satan offered Him an earthly kingdom, but His Father planned so much more (Matt. 4:8-11)! The words echo the great Son of Man text of Daniel 7:14 where the Bible declares of this heavenly, divine Man, "Then to Him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, That all peoples, nations, and languages should serve Him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, And His kingdom the one Which shall not be destroyed" (NKJV). John Piper, as only he can, gets to the heart of these words and says,

"Here we see the *peak of power*. Notice verse 18. Jesus says, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me." ...if you gathered all the authority of all the governments and armies of the world and put them in the scales with the authority of the risen Christ, they would go up in the balance like air. *All authority* on earth has been given to the risen Christ. *All* of it! The risen Christ has the right to tell every man, woman, and child on this planet

today what they should do and think and feel. He has absolute and total authority over your life and over cities and states and nations. The risen Christ is great—greater than you have ever imagined.

Here is our witness to the world: The risen Christ is your king and has absolute, unlimited authority over your life. If you do not bow and worship him and trust him and obey him, you commit high treason against Christ the King, who is God over all. The resurrection is God's open declaration that he lays claim on every person and tribe and tongue and nation... "All authority on earth is mine." Your sex life is his to rule; your business is his to rule; your career is his to rule; your home is his; your children are his, your vacation is his, your body is his; He is *God!* So if you resist his claim, feel no admiration for his infinite power and authority, and turn finally to seek satisfaction from thrills that allow you to be your own master, then you will be executed for treason in the last day. And it will appear so reasonable and so right that you should be executed for your disloyalty to your Maker and Redeemer that there will be no appeals and no objections. Your life of indifference to the risen Christ and of half-hearted attention now and then to a few of his commandments will appear on that day

as supremely blameworthy and infinitely foolish, and you will...weep that you did not change.”

(“Worship the Risen Christ”, 4-3-83).

II. Obey His Authoritative Plan. 28:19-20

- Commenting on Matt 28:19, John Calvin wrote, “...now the wall is pulled down and the Lord orders the ministers of the gospel to go far out to scatter the teaching of salvation throughout all the regions of the earth.” (George, 39). Tragically many in Carey’s day, as well as our own, have imbibed the spirit of the 18th century anti-missions hymn:

“Go into all the world,

The Lord of old did say.

But now where He has planted thee,

There thou shouldst stay.”

- Carey would have no part of this spiritually bankrupt and impotent thinking. Rather, having his heart gripped by the words of our Savior, he said,

“I care not where or how I lived, or what hardships I went through, so that I could but gain souls for Christ. While I was asleep I dreamed of these things, and when I awoke the first thing I thought of was this great work. All my desire was for the conversion of the heathen, and all my hope was in God” (George 45).
- The imperative or command of verse 19 is “make disciples.” The “therefore” links the command to the “all authority” declaration of v. 18. Further, wed to an

imperative, the 3 participles “going, baptizing and teaching,” orbiting in the same galaxy, receive the force and thrust of imperatives. Thus Jesus charges us, commands us to make disciples by going, make disciples by baptizing, and make disciples by teaching.

1) **Make disciples by going. 28:19**

- There is no need to pray and ask God if we should go and take the gospel to the nations. We have been told to go. Again John Piper nails us when he says,

So there you have the word of God from the mouth of Jesus. The lofty claim: “all authority is given to me.” The loving comfort: I am with you always, even to the end of the age.” The last command: “go make disciples among all the peoples of the world.” What is clear from this final word of Jesus is that he is trying to move us to act. He not only says, “Go make disciples.” He also gives us a warrant for doing it so that we can know it is a legitimate and right thing to do: all authority in heaven and on earth is his. And he gives us tremendous encouragement and comfort and strength to go, with the promise that he would go with us and never leave us. Jesus ended his earthly life with these words because he wanted us to respond. He was motivating us to act.

(“The Lofty Claim, the Last Command, the Loving Comfort”, 11-1-98).

- Do you need a reason to go? No! You need a reason to stay! 1.6 billion people have yet to hear the name of Jesus.
- R.T. France captures the theological thrust of Jesus’ command to go when he says, “Jesus’ vision of the future heavenly enthronement of the Son of Man in 24:30 led naturally into a mission to gather his chosen people from all over the earth (24:31)...But the agents of this ingathering are not now to be angels... but those who are already Jesus’ disciples” (p. 1114).
- Go and make more followers, more disciples of Jesus. Go, and where? All the nations (*panta ta ethne*).
- Carey journal, March 29, 1794.
 “O what is there in all this world worth living for but the presence and service of God – I feel a burning desire that all the world may know this God and serve Him-” Go and make disciples.

2) **Make disciples by baptizing.** **28:19**

- Here is the badge of being a disciple. Here is where biblical profession of faith takes place. Here is my unashamed identification with Jesus as my Lord by public declaration.
- Baptism – immersion, plain and clear.
Name – singular.
Father, Son and Holy Spirit – Father, Savior, and Comforter, the Triune God.

- What joy to initiate new believers into the church of the Lord Jesus as they identify themselves with Christ in death, burial and resurrection. And that they would be found in every nation and from all the peoples of the earth! What a gospel! What a mission! What an assignment!
- Closing his *Enquiry* with a word of missionary encouragement Carey wrote, “What a heaven will it be to see the many myriads of poor heathens... who by their labors have been brought to the knowledge of God. Surely a “crown of rejoicing” (1 Thess 2:19) like this is worth aspiring to. Surely it is worth while to lay ourselves out with all our might in promoting the cause and kingdom of Christ” (E.57).

3) Make disciples by teaching. 28:20

- We do not make converts. We are called to make disciples, “little Christ’s”, who observe all His teachings. James Boice well says, “Robust disciples are not made by watered-down teaching” (p. 649). A “hit & run” approach to missions and ministry will fail to accomplish this. Short-term endeavors, though commendable and valuable, are no substitute for those who give years, even the rest of their lives, to teach other who can teach others who can teach others.
- Baptism is preschool enrollment into a school of learning that one never graduates from! But someone must go and teach them.

III. Trust His Amazing Promise. 28:20

- William Carey was a great man, but he was a man. Life brought him many tragedies. Francis Wayland said of him, “Like most of the master minds of all

ages, Carey was educated in the school of adversity” (George, 94). There were times when his soul was plunged to the depths of depression. He would bury 2 wives, with his 1st, Dorothy, sorrowfully, going insane. He would bury three children, and certain others disappointed him. He lost most of his hair due to illness in his early 20’s, served in India for 41 years never taking a furlough, fought back dysentery and malaria, and did not baptize his first Indian convert, Krishna Pal, until his 7th year on the field! What kept him going? What promise of God did He claim again and again in the face of discouragement and defeat? He had asked his friend John Williams in 1801, “Pray for us that we may be faithful to the end” (George, 154). He was! How? This promise:

“And lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.”

- Two aspects to this amazing promise sustained Carey, and they will sustain us as well wherever the Lord might send us.
 - 1) He will be with you constantly (“always”).
 - 2) He will be with you continually (“to the end of the age”).

Knowing God was with him constantly and continually saw him through those valleys of the shadow of death, “dungeons of despair,” and feelings of total inadequacy.

- In a letter to his father he wrote concerning his call:

“I see more and more of my own insufficiency for the great work I am called to. The truths of God are amazingly profound, the souls of men infinitely precious, my own ignorance very great and all that I do is for God who knows

my motives and my ends, my diligence or negligence.

When I (in short) compare myself with my work, I sink into a point, a mere despicable nothing.” (George, 25).

- Journal (Aug. 27-31, 1794)

August 27

Nothing new, my Soul is in general barren and unfruitful; Yet I find a pleasure in drawing near to God; and a peculiar sweetness in His Holy Word. I find it more & more to be a very precious treasure –

August 28-30

Nothing of any importance except to my shame, a prevalence of Carnality, negligence, and spiritual deadness; no Heart for Private Duties, indeed everything seems to be going to decay in my Soul, and I almost despair of being any use to the Heathen at all –

August 31

Was somewhat engaged more than of late in the things of God, felt some new devotedness to God, and desired to live entirely to him, and for his Glory; O that I could live always as under his Eye, and feel a sense of his immediate presence, this is Life and all besides this is death to my Soul.

G. Campbell Morgan was reading Matthew 28:20 to an 85 year old saint. Finishing the verse he said, “That is a great promise. She looked up and said sharply, with the light of sanctified humor in her eyes; “That is not a promise at all, that is a fact. Oh if the church of God could remember that fact!” (Matthew, 321).

Conclusion: Matthew 28 begins with a resurrection and ends with a commission. These final words of our Lord are weighty, heavy, not easily digested. And, they do not need an adrenalin response. They need a cardiac, a heart response. They need a response that has carefully considered the King who speaks them, and the kind of servant who obeys them. Once more hear the words of the man William Carey who heard and heeded His Master's call. "A Christian minister is a person who is "not his own" (1Cor. 6:19); he is the servant of God, and therefore ought to be wholly devoted to him. By entering on that sacred office he solemnly undertakes to be always engaged as much as possible in the Lord's work, and not to choose his own pleasure or employment, or pursue the ministry as something that is to subserve his own ends or interest, or as a kind of sideline. He engages to go where God pleases, and to do or endure what he sees fit to command or call him to in the exercise of his function. He virtually bids farewell to friends, pleasures, and comforts, and stands in readiness to endure the greatest sufferings in the work of the Lord, his Master. It is inconsistent for ministers to please themselves with thoughts of numerous congregations, cordial friends, a civilized country, legal protection, affluence, splendour, or even an income that is sufficient. The slights and hatred of men, and even pretended friends, gloomy prisons, and tortures, the society of barbarians of uncouth speech, miserable accommodations in wretched wildernesses, hunger and thirst, nakedness, weariness, and diligence, hard work, and but little worldly encouragement, should rather be the objects of their expectation.... I question whether all are justified in staying here, while so many are perishing without means of grace in other lands.... On the contrary the commission is a sufficient call to them to venture all, and, like the primitive Christians, go everywhere preaching the gospel." (E. 50).

- On his 70th birthday, 3 years before his death, Carey would give his own humble evaluation of his life and ministry. Herein we discover something of the man that made him great for God. In a letter to his son Jabez he write,

“I am this day seventy years old, a monument of Divine mercy and goodness, though on a review of my life I find much, very much, for which I ought to be humbled in the dust; my direct and positive sins are innumerable, my negligence in the Lord’s work has been great, I have not promoted his cause, nor sought his glory and honour as I ought, notwithstanding all this, I am spared till now, and am still retained in his Work, and I trust I am receive into the divine favour through him. I wish to be more entirely devoted to his service, more completely sanctified and more habitually exercising all the Christian Graces, and bringing forth the fruits of righteousness to the praise and honour of that Saviour who gave his life a sacrifice for sin.”

(George, 155).

- Dying on June 9, 1834, these simple words would be inscribed on the stone slab that marked his grave in Serampore, India:

“A wretched, poor, and helpless worm, on thy kind arms I fall” (George, 168).

- Would to God that He would raise up from this place an army of such wretched, poor and helpless worms. The world needs them. Jesus deserves them. Southeastern should provide them.

- Southeastern and the International Mission Board have a wonderful relationship. Recently Jerry Rankin, President of the International Mission Board issued this statement about Southeastern. “The increasing number and consistent flow of missionary candidates coming from Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary for service with the International Mission Board indicates a passion for missions that permeates the campus. Southeastern has emerged as a preeminent equipper for Great Commission fulfillment, not only in the training of future missionaries, but those who go to pastor, serve on church staffs and in other areas of ministry are impacted and influenced by a focus on missions through studies in every department and academic discipline.” Jerry Rankin, President, IMB

I believe we are doing well. I am convinced our precious Lord wants us to do even more!

What will be your place in this awesome enterprise of global missions and evangelization? I think perhaps you should go!