

FAITHFUL TO THE WORD

Systematic Theology Series

ECCLESIOLOGY

The Doctrine of the Church

One Body, One Lord, One Faith, One Baptism, One God and Father of All

UNIT 10: THE CHURCH'S MISSION

Sent into the World with the Gospel of Jesus Christ

Lesson 28

THE GREAT COMMISSION

Making Disciples of All Nations — The Church's Marching Orders Until Christ Returns

The church does not go into the world to seek permission, to negotiate favorable terms, or to find a welcome audience. She goes under the authority of the risen Lord, with the gospel of the crucified Savior, in the power of the promised Spirit — and those qualifications are sufficient for every frontier she is called to cross.

“All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.”

Matthew 28:18–20, NASB 1995

Key Texts: Matthew 28:18–20; Acts 1:8; 13:1–3; Romans 10:14–15; 2 Corinthians 5:18–20; Mark 16:15

“I write so that you will know how one ought to conduct himself in the household of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and support of the truth.”

1 Timothy 3:15, NASB 1995

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Introduction

The entire series has been building toward this moment. Unit 1 established the theological foundations of the covenant community. Units 2 and 3 defined its nature and identity. Unit 4 established the regenerate membership that constitutes it. Unit 5 described the governance that orders it. Units 6 and 7 examined the ordinances that seal and renew the covenant it lives under. Unit 8 addressed the discipline that maintains its integrity. Unit 9 described the corporate worship in which it gathers before the living God. Now Unit 10 turns to the question that the entire preceding argument has been preparing for: what is this community for? What does the community that has been constituted, governed, sealed, disciplined, and gathered do when it disperses from the gathered assembly back into the world? The answer is the Great Commission: 'Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations' (Matthew 28:19). The community gathers to encounter the living God; it disperses to declare the living God to the world He is reconciling to Himself in Christ.

The Great Commission is the most comprehensive summary of the church's mission in all of Scripture, and it is addressed not merely to the eleven disciples on the mountain in Galilee but to the covenant community in every age and every location from Pentecost to the parousia. It is the commission under which this specific congregation labors in its specific location, with its specific gifts, resources, and relationships. Every member of the covenant community who has been constituted as the new covenant community through faith in Jesus Christ has received this commission, and the local congregation is the primary institutional form through which the commission is received, resourced, and fulfilled in any specific time and place. Understanding the Great Commission, its authority, its central imperative, its means, its scope, and its promise, is not merely an academic exercise in biblical theology; it is the practical formation of a community that knows its purpose and pursues it with the full engagement of every member and every resource it possesses.

The contemporary evangelical church's relationship to the Great Commission is, at its best, earnest and engaged; at its worst, confused about the nature of its mission, the proper means for its fulfillment, and the relationship between disciple-making and the broader cultural influence the church inevitably has. Some congregations reduce the mission to programs, annual conferences, offerings, and the support of distant missionaries. Others expand it to include every form of social and cultural engagement, risking the displacement of Christ's specific commission to make disciples. This lesson argues for the text-grounded, apostolically authorized understanding of the Great Commission and for the local church as the primary sending and sustaining agency for its fulfillment.

The lesson moves through the authority behind the mission, the central imperative and its meaning, the specific means of disciple-making, the universal scope of the commission, the promise of Christ's presence that guarantees the mission's ultimate success, the local church as the commission's primary institutional form, and the relationship between the disciple-making mission and the cultural engagement that faithful disciples inevitably produce. The treatment throughout is both theologically serious and pastorally practical: the Great Commission is not merely a text to be expounded but a mandate to be obeyed, and the congregation that hears it with genuine theological understanding is the congregation that is most fully equipped to obey it with genuine missional faithfulness.

I. THE AUTHORITY BEHIND THE MISSION

All Authority Has Been Given to Me

A. The Risen Lord's Comprehensive Authority

The Great Commission does not begin with the imperative; it begins with the declaration that grounds the imperative: 'All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth' (Matthew 28:18). The commission is issued from this authority, under this authority, and in the confidence of this authority. Before the church is told to go, it is told who is sending it. Before the community is given its task, it is given its ground. The ground is not the community's own spiritual resources, its cultural influence, its institutional strength, or the favorable reception it may hope to receive from the world it is entering. The ground is the comprehensive, universal, absolute authority of the risen Lord Jesus Christ, the authority over heaven and earth given to Him by the Father at His exaltation following the resurrection.

The language of Matthew 28:18 is drawn from Daniel 7:13-14, the vision of the Son of Man receiving dominion, glory, and a kingdom from the Ancient of Days: 'And to Him was given dominion, glory and a kingdom, that all the peoples, nations and men of every language might serve Him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion which will not pass away; and His kingdom is one which will not be destroyed.' The risen Christ who speaks the Great Commission is the exalted Son of Man who has received what Daniel 7 envisioned. He has been given authority over all creation, not merely religious authority over those who choose to acknowledge Him, not merely spiritual authority over the inner life of His followers, but comprehensive cosmic authority over every domain of heaven and earth. This is the authority under which the church goes.

The practical consequence of the commission's grounding in Christ's comprehensive authority is the community's freedom from the anxiety that attends missions undertaken in the community's own strength. The church does not go into the world to seek permission, to negotiate favorable terms, or to find a welcome audience. It goes under the authority of the One to whom all authority has been given, and that authority is sufficient for every frontier the commission calls the church to cross. The hostile culture that rejects the gospel is still under the authority of the One who sent the church into it. The powerful government that opposes the church's witness is still under the authority of the One who authorized that witness. The unreached people group that has never heard the Name is still under the dominion of the One who commanded the church to bring the Name to all nations. The authority is absolute; the commission issued under it is accordingly absolute.

B. The Commission in its Resurrection Context

The commission's resurrection context is not incidental to its authority or its meaning. Matthew 28:18-20 is the risen Christ's first comprehensive self-disclosure of His post-resurrection authority and purpose. He has passed through death and come out the other side as Lord of both the dead and the living, as the firstborn from the dead (Colossians 1:18), as the One who holds the keys of death and of Hades (Revelation 1:18). The authority He claims in Matthew 28:18 is the authority of the resurrection, the authority of the One who has demonstrated His power over the ultimate enemy of human existence and who issues the commission from the far side of that ultimate victory. The community that goes in the name of this Lord goes in the confidence of the One who has already won the decisive battle; the mission is the mopping-up operation of a victory that has already been secured.

Acts 1:8 provides the companion to Matthew 28's commission in Luke's two-volume account of the gospel's advance: 'but you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth.' The power for the commission's fulfillment is not the community's own strength but the Spirit's power; the pattern of the commission's fulfillment is concentric, Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, the ends of the earth, reflecting the geographic and ethnic movement of the gospel across Acts' narrative. The Spirit who empowers the witness in Acts 1:8 is the same Spirit who was poured out at Pentecost in Acts 2, whose power produced the three-thousand-person harvest of Peter's sermon, whose presence sustained the apostolic community through the persecutions of Acts 3-9 and the mission of Acts 10-28. The Spirit is the commission's power source; the community is its instrument; and the risen Lord is the authority behind it all.

The resurrection context also establishes the inseparable connection between the gospel's content and the commission's imperative. The message the community is commissioned to proclaim is specifically the gospel of the crucified and risen Christ, the specific historical events of the death, burial, and resurrection that Matthew 28 presupposes and that 1 Corinthians 15:1-8 defines as the apostolic gospel's essential content. The community that is sent to make disciples is sent to make disciples of the risen Christ, not a philosophical system, not a therapeutic program, not a moral vision, and not a cultural reform project. Disciples of the risen Christ, formed in the specific knowledge of who He is and what He has done and what He requires of those who follow Him, produced through the specific means of the Word proclaimed and the covenant community received. The commission's authority and the commission's content are inseparable: the risen Lord who has all authority issues a specific commission to proclaim a specific gospel to produce a specific kind of disciple.

II. THE CENTRAL IMPERATIVE: MAKE DISCIPLES

Not Converts, Not Decisions, but Disciples

A. *The Grammar of the Commission*

The grammatical structure of Matthew 28:19-20 is among the most theologically significant syntactical observations in the New Testament. The Greek text contains four verbs: 'go' (*poreuthentes*, a participle), 'make disciples' (*matheteusate*, the only main imperative), 'baptizing' (*baptizontes*, a participle), and 'teaching' (*didaskontes*, a participle). The only main imperative in the entire sentence is 'make disciples', not 'go,' not 'baptize,' not 'teach,' but 'make disciples.' The going, the baptizing, and the teaching are all the means and the manner of the disciple-making; the disciple-making is the singular, governing commission. This grammatical observation has enormous practical significance: the primary calling of the church in mission is not to go (though it must go), not to baptize (though it must baptize), and not to teach (though it must teach). It is to make disciples. Everything else, the going, the baptizing, the teaching, is in service of the one irreducible imperative.

A disciple is a learner, a follower, a committed student of a teacher whose way of life the disciple is deliberately adopting as his own. In the New Testament, discipleship to Jesus Christ is not a spiritual experience that can be had in an instant and then owned forever regardless of subsequent development. It is a way of life, a pattern of following, learning, obeying, and becoming increasingly conformed to the character and the purposes of the One being followed. The disciple of Jesus Christ is not someone who has made a decision, signed a card, or prayed a

prayer (though genuine faith will produce all of these at the appropriate moments). The disciple is someone whose life is being fundamentally oriented around the person, the teaching, the death, and the resurrection of Jesus Christ, someone who is learning His words, following His way, bearing His cross, and being formed into His image by the Spirit who dwells within.

The church that has reduced its mission to the production of converts, individuals who have made a one-time decision for Christ without ongoing formation in His teaching and His community, has produced exactly what a shallow missiology produces: large numbers of nominal Christians whose faith lacks the depth, the formation, and the community that genuine discipleship requires for long-term covenant faithfulness. The commission is not 'make converts'; it is 'make disciples.' The difference is not merely semantic; it is the difference between a transaction and a transformation, between a moment and a life, between a decision and a direction. The congregation that has understood the commission's actual imperative will invest the same pastoral seriousness in the formation of its members in the knowledge and the obedience of Christ that Lesson 27 called it to invest in the preached Word, because the disciple-making that the commission requires is accomplished precisely through the means that the gathered community provides: the Word proclaimed and received, the covenant sealed and renewed, the accountability of the covenant community's mutual care.

B. Disciples of Jesus Christ

The specific discipleship to which the commission calls the church is discipleship to Jesus Christ, not discipleship to a theological system, a cultural tradition, or a denominational heritage. The commission's 'make disciples' is immediately qualified by the context of the One being followed: the disciples are to be baptized 'in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit' (verse 19) and taught 'to observe all that I commanded you' (verse 20). The 'I commanded you' is the risen Christ's entire teaching, the full body of instruction that Matthew's Gospel has been recording and that the church received in the apostolic deposit preserved in Scripture. Discipleship to Christ is discipleship to the Christ of the whole Scripture: the Christ who taught in the Sermon on the Mount, the Christ who confronted the Pharisees, the Christ who healed the sick and cast out demons, the Christ who predicted His death and resurrection, the Christ who died on the cross and rose on the third day, and the Christ who is now exalted at the Father's right hand with all authority in heaven and on earth.

The christological specificity of the commission has enormous implications for the content of the church's missionary proclamation. The church is not commissioned to proclaim a generic theism, a universal spiritual consciousness, or a culturally accessible spirituality. It is commissioned to proclaim the specific, historically located, theologically defined gospel of Jesus Christ, the announcement that the crucified Galilean carpenter is the Lord of heaven and earth, the Savior of sinners, the risen Head of the new covenant community, and the returning King before whom every knee will bow. This proclamation is not negotiable; its specific content is not subject to cultural translation that preserves the emotional resonance while emptying the theological substance. The commission to make disciples of Jesus Christ requires the proclamation of Jesus Christ in His full biblical identity, crucified, risen, reigning, and returning, not a culturally curated version of Jesus that removes the elements the surrounding culture finds offensive.

Second Corinthians 5:18-20 adds the most comprehensive Pauline account of the church's commission in terms of reconciliation: 'Now all these things are from God, who reconciled us to Himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation, namely, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and He has committed to us the word of reconciliation. Therefore, we are ambassadors

for Christ, as though God were making an appeal through us; we beg you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God.' The ministry of reconciliation, the proclamation that God is not counting trespasses against those who receive the reconciliation accomplished in Christ, is the specific content of the church's ambassadorial mission. The church does not go into the world with a general message of spiritual improvement; it goes with the specific message that God has acted in Christ to accomplish the reconciliation that human beings need and that only the death and resurrection of the Son of God can provide.

III. THE MEANS OF DISCIPLE-MAKING

Baptizing and Teaching

A. Baptizing: Entry into the Covenant Community

The commission specifies two participial means through which the disciple-making is accomplished: baptizing and teaching. Together they describe the full process of disciple-making as the church is commissioned to practice it: baptizing brings the new disciple into the visible covenant community through the covenant sign that publicly declares his faith and his entry into the community constituted by that faith; teaching forms the disciple in the knowledge and the obedience of everything that Christ has commanded, sustaining and deepening the covenant life that baptism has publicly initiated. Both are necessary; neither is sufficient alone. Baptism without ongoing teaching produces a community of members who have entered the covenant but are not being formed in its content. Teaching without baptism produces disciples who are being formed in the covenant's content but who have not entered it through the public covenant sign that the commission specifically prescribes.

The baptism specified in the commission is trinitarian in its formula ('in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit') and covenantal in its function. Unit 6 of this series examined the theology of baptism in detail, establishing baptism as the new covenant's entry sign, the public declaration of the believer's faith in Christ, the public enactment of the covenant entry that the faith already represents, and the public reception of the new believer into the visible covenant community of the church. The commission's specific prescription of baptism as the means of the new disciple's formal entry into the community confirms what Unit 6 established: baptism is not a peripheral optional extra that mature Christians eventually get around to; it is the commission-prescribed first act of covenant community formation, the public marker of the new disciple's entry into the community that will provide the ongoing teaching and mutual accountability that genuine disciple-making requires.

The Acts narrative confirms the pattern: every conversion narrative in Acts is followed by immediate baptism. Peter's Pentecost sermon produces three thousand who 'were baptized' (Acts 2:41). The Ethiopian eunuch receives Philip's exposition of Isaiah 53, believes, and is immediately baptized (Acts 8:36-38). The Philippian jailer's household is baptized 'immediately' after their conversion in the middle of the night (Acts 16:33). Cornelius and his household are commanded to be baptized immediately after the Spirit falls on them (Acts 10:47-48). The pattern is consistent and deliberate: faith receives baptism; baptism receives the community; the community provides the ongoing teaching that forms the disciple in the full knowledge of Christ. The commission's prescribed sequence (baptizing, then teaching all that Christ commanded) maps precisely onto the pattern of Acts' conversion and community narratives.

B. Teaching: Formation in the Full Knowledge of Christ

The teaching that the commission prescribes is comprehensive in its scope: 'teaching them to observe all that I commanded you' (verse 20). The 'all that I commanded you' is the entire apostolic deposit, the full body of Christ's teaching as it was transmitted through the apostolic witness and preserved in the Scripture. The commission does not authorize a selective teaching ministry that focuses on the parts of Christ's teaching most culturally accessible or most immediately relevant to the audience's felt needs; it authorizes and requires the full, systematic, comprehensive teaching of everything that Christ commanded, with the goal not merely of cognitive understanding ('teaching them all that I commanded') but of covenantal obedience ('teaching them to observe all that I commanded'). The teaching is complete when the disciple not only knows what Christ commanded but is actually living in the obedience that genuine knowledge of Christ always produces.

The relationship between the commission's teaching mandate and the systematic theology series of which this lesson is a part deserves explicit acknowledgment. This thirty-lesson series, addressing the foundations of the covenant community, its nature, its membership, its governance, its ordinances, its discipline, its worship, and now its mission, is itself an expression of the teaching mandate that the Great Commission prescribes. The congregation that works through this material systematically is a congregation that is fulfilling, in one specific form, the teaching component of the commission: it is being taught the full body of doctrine that Christ's apostolic witness has defined, for the purpose of the covenantal obedience that genuine knowledge of God always produces. The theological formation that this series provides is not an end in itself; it is the formation of a community in the knowledge and the obedience of Christ that the commission specifically requires.

The Acts 2:42 summary of the apostolic community's four characteristic practices, the apostles' teaching, fellowship, the breaking of bread, and prayer, is the New Testament's most concise description of the ongoing teaching ministry that the commission's second means specifies. The apostles' teaching is the first of the four practices, and it is the practice that provides the theological content for the other three: the fellowship that is genuinely covenantal rather than merely social, the Lord's Supper that is genuinely understood and genuinely received, and the prayer that is genuinely addressed to the God who is genuinely known through the teaching. The teaching ministry that the commission prescribes is not a discrete class or a series of topical presentations; it is the comprehensive, ongoing, Spirit-dependent formation of the community in the full knowledge of Christ through every means available to the gathered community.

IV. THE SCOPE OF THE COMMISSION

All the Nations

A. *Panta ta Ethne: Every People Group on Earth*

The scope of the Great Commission is among its most theologically and practically significant features: 'make disciples of all the nations' (*panta ta ethne*). The Greek phrase is not 'all the countries' or 'all the governments' but 'all the nations', specifically, all the ethnolinguistic people groups of the earth, the specific cultural, linguistic, and tribal communities that constitute the human diversity of the world. The commission does not authorize the church to go to the nations it finds most accessible, most culturally similar, or most likely to respond favorably. It commissions the church to pursue all nations, every people group that has not yet received the gospel, every

ethnolinguistic community that has not yet produced a community of disciples gathered in the name of the risen Christ, every corner of the human family that has not yet heard the Name that is above every name.

The 'all nations' of Matthew 28:19 is the fulfillment of the Abrahamic promise that has governed the biblical narrative since Genesis 12:3: 'in you all the families of the earth will be blessed.' The Messiah who was promised to Abraham as the means of blessing all families of the earth is the same Christ who now commissions His community to bring that blessing to all nations through the disciple-making that produces the new covenant community among every people group on earth. The commission is missiological and eschatological simultaneously: it is the specific mandate under which the church labors until every nation has been reached, and it is the condition under which the end will come. Matthew 24:14: 'This gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all the nations, and then the end will come.' The completion of the commission is connected to the consummation of the age; the mission is the church's appointed work until the Lord returns.

Acts 1:8's geographic progression, Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and the remotest part of the earth, provides the commission's practical shape: the mission begins where the community already is (Jerusalem), moves to the immediately surrounding region (Judea), crosses the culturally proximate but socially distant boundary (Samaria), and presses outward to the ends of the earth. The pattern is not merely historical; it is the structural description of the mission's progressive scope. Every local congregation is simultaneously engaged in all four dimensions of the Acts 1:8 commission: its immediate community (Jerusalem), its broader region (Judea), the culturally proximate but socially distant communities it has not yet reached (Samaria), and the globally unreached peoples that represent the furthest horizon of the commission's scope. The local congregation that has understood the full scope of the commission will be engaged in mission at all four levels simultaneously, not sequentially.

B. The Unreached Peoples and the Completion of the Commission

The specific emphasis on 'all the nations' as the commission's scope carries a particular urgency for the church of the twenty-first century, given the significant populations of unreached ethnolinguistic peoples who have never heard a clear presentation of the gospel. Missiological research consistently identifies thousands of people groups with little or no evangelical presence, communities in which the gospel has never been effectively proclaimed in culturally accessible form, in which the Name of Jesus Christ is either unknown or associated only with foreign cultural imperialism rather than with the liberating truth of the crucified and risen Lord. The commission's scope encompasses these unreached peoples with the same urgency as it encompasses the accessible neighborhoods of the well-resourced evangelical congregation, and the congregation that has genuinely received the commission will allow the urgency of the unreached to shape its missional priorities, its financial investments, and its prayer life with the same seriousness it gives to the neighbors it already knows and the communities it can most easily reach.

The relationship between the local church's near mission and its far mission, between the congregation's witness in its own community and its support for the global mission among unreached peoples, is one of the most practically challenging dimensions of genuine obedience to the commission. The congregation that invests all of its missional resources in its local community has not understood the commission's scope; the congregation that sends all of its missional energy to the global frontier while neglecting the lost in its own neighborhood has not understood the commission's local dimension. The full commission calls the church to both, to be simultaneously a witness in its specific location and a supporter of the global mission to all nations. The specific allocation of the

congregation's missional resources between local witness and global mission is a matter for the prayerful, Spirit-guided discernment of the congregation's leadership; the principle that the allocation must honor the commission's full scope is not negotiable.

Romans 10:14-15 establishes the necessary condition for the unreached peoples' reception of the gospel in the same logical chain that verse 17 established for faith in general: 'How then will they call on Him in whom they have not believed? How will they believe in Him whom they have not heard? And how will they hear without a preacher? How will they preach unless they are sent? Just as it is written, How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news of good things!' The chain is clear: the unreached peoples cannot call on Christ unless they believe in Him; they cannot believe in Him without hearing the gospel; they cannot hear without a preacher; the preacher cannot go without being sent. The sending that produces the hearing that produces the faith that produces the calling is the church's specific responsibility in relation to the unreached peoples, and the congregation that has genuinely received the commission will take its sending responsibility with the seriousness that the chain of dependence requires.

V. THE PROMISE OF CHRIST'S PRESENCE

I Am with You Always

A. The Guarantee of the Mission

The Great Commission closes with the promise that is simultaneously the commission's most extraordinary feature and its most practically sustaining resource: 'and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age' (Matthew 28:20). The promise is unqualified, not 'I will be with you when the mission goes well,' not 'I will be with you when you are faithful,' but 'I am with you always.' It is personal, not 'the memory of My teaching will sustain you' or 'the Spirit of My ministry will encourage you' but 'I am with you', the risen, reigning, authority-possessing Christ Himself, personally present with the community that goes in His name. And it is temporal, 'even to the end of the age,' which is to say until the commission is complete, until the end for which Matthew 24:14 says the gospel must first be preached to all nations has come.

The promise of Christ's presence is the Great Commission's answer to the question that every missionary, every evangelist, and every member of the covenant community engaged in the disciple-making mission will eventually ask: what do I have that is sufficient for this task? The task is vast, all the nations of the earth. The task is opposed, by spiritual powers, by cultural hostility, by the hardness of the human heart apart from the Spirit's work. The task is costly, in time, in relationships, in comfort, and sometimes in safety and life. What resource does the commission provide that is adequate to a task this large, this opposed, and this costly? The answer is the presence of the One who has all authority in heaven and on earth: 'I am with you always.' The risen Lord who has defeated death, who holds all authority, and who has promised the Spirit's power is personally present with the community He has sent.

The promise connects Matthew 28:20 to Matthew 18:20: 'For where two or three have gathered together in My name, I am there in their midst.' The presence of Christ with the gathered covenant community, the presence that the regulative principle of worship takes seriously as the context of the community's corporate prayer and praise, is the same presence that goes with the community as it disperses into the world in obedience to the commission.

The Christ who is present in the gathered assembly is the Christ who is present in the mission field; the Christ who speaks through the preached Word is the Christ who speaks through the ambassador's proclamation; the Christ who gathers His community around the Lord's Table is the Christ who goes with His community to the ends of the earth. The gathered life and the dispersed mission are not two separate zones of the community's life; they are two dimensions of the same life, animated by the same promised presence, under the same comprehensive authority.

B. The Eschatological Horizon

The promise's temporal qualification, 'even to the end of the age', situates the Great Commission in its proper eschatological horizon. The commission is the church's appointed work for the entire period between the resurrection and the return of Christ, the entire age during which the gospel must be proclaimed to all nations before the end comes. The community that has genuinely received the commission lives with the awareness that every generation of the church is living between Pentecost and the parousia, between the Spirit's outpouring that inaugurated the mission and the Lord's return that will complete it. The mission has a beginning (the resurrection and Pentecost), a scope (all nations), and an end (the parousia); and the community that understands all three will engage the mission with the urgency of a community that knows it is living in the interim between the decisive victory and the final consummation.

The amillennial eschatology that this series has consistently affirmed provides the framework within which the commission's eschatological urgency is properly understood. Christ reigns now, at the Father's right hand, with all authority in heaven and on earth, and His reign is the authority under which the commission proceeds. The kingdom is not something the church is building through the mission; it is the reality that the mission is declaring and into which the mission is gathering. The church makes disciples of the King who already reigns; it gathers people into the community of those who acknowledge the reign that is already the cosmic reality. The mission is urgent not because the kingdom's success is uncertain but because its universal declaration is incomplete: the King has all authority, but not all nations have yet heard His name, and the commission calls the community to continue until they have.

The practical implication of the eschatological horizon is a specific kind of missional patience and missional urgency that the community must hold together. The patience comes from the recognition that the commission will be completed, the Lord who has all authority will not fail to bring the gospel to all nations before the end comes, and that the community's specific contribution to the completion is not the sole condition of the mission's success. The urgency comes from the recognition that the commission is assigned to this generation, in this time and this place, and that the unreached peoples of this generation's world are waiting for the announcement that only the sent community can bring. Patience and urgency together: the patience of those who know the mission will succeed, and the urgency of those who know it has been assigned to them.

VI. THE LOCAL CHURCH AS SENDING AGENCY

The Congregation at the Center of the Mission

A. Acts 13 and the Apostolic Pattern

The Great Commission is addressed to the covenant community, not to individual entrepreneurs who pursue the mission independently of the community that has formed and commissioned them. The New Testament's most sustained account of the commission's institutional form is the pattern established in Acts 13:1-3, when the church at Antioch, described as a community of prophets and teachers gathered in worship and fasting, was instructed by the Spirit to 'Set apart for Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.' The church prayed, fasted, laid hands on them, and sent them out. The pattern is clear and deliberate: the Spirit calls, the church discerns the call, the church commissions and sends, and the missionaries go as the community's sent representatives. When Paul and Barnabas return from their first missionary journey, they return to Antioch and 'gathered the church together and began to report all things that God had done with them' (Acts 14:27). The local church is the sending agency; the missionaries are the church's sent representatives; and the reporting back to the church is the completion of the missional circuit.

The Acts 13 pattern establishes the local church as the primary institutional form through which the Great Commission is fulfilled, against the alternative model in which the commission is fulfilled primarily through parachurch organizations that operate independently of specific local church authorization and accountability. The parachurch organization, the mission agency, the campus ministry, the para-local evangelistic organization, has produced enormous good in the history of Protestant missions, and its contribution to the extension of the gospel to unreached peoples is not to be minimized or dismissed. But the New Testament's own pattern gives the primary sending, supporting, and accountable relationship to the local church, not to independent organizations. The congregation that has genuinely received the commission will not delegate the mission to parachurch organizations while disengaging from its own primary responsibility as the sending community; it will fulfill its own responsibilities as a sending community and may appropriately partner with mission agencies as extensions of its own missional engagement.

The specific responsibilities of the local church as the commission's primary sending agency include: the identification and formation of those whom the Spirit is calling to cross-cultural or vocational missionary work; the financial support of those sent out from the community; the sustained prayer for the mission and for those engaged in it; the pastoral accountability that the sent missionaries maintain with the congregation that sent them; and the celebration of the mission's fruit in ways that form the whole congregation in the missional vision that the commission requires. The congregation that fulfills these responsibilities is the congregation that is most fully participating in the commission's fulfillment, not merely as a spectator of someone else's mission but as an actively engaged sending community whose prayers, resources, and relationships are woven into the fabric of the global mission.

B. Every Member as a Missional Witness

The Great Commission's address to the entire covenant community, not merely to apostles, missionaries, and pastors, means that every member of the covenant community is a participant in the commission's fulfillment. Acts 8:1-4 is the most dramatic New Testament illustration of this principle: when persecution scattered the Jerusalem church, 'those who had been scattered went about preaching the word.' The word translated 'preaching' (euangelizomenoi) is the same word used for the apostolic proclamation; the scattered members of the Jerusalem church were not professional evangelists but ordinary disciples who took the gospel with them wherever the persecution drove them. The commission is not the professional responsibility of the ordained; it is the communal responsibility of the redeemed.

The practical implication of every member's missional responsibility is a specific kind of communal formation that the congregation must provide: the theological formation that equips every member to give an account of the hope that is within them (1 Peter 3:15), the relational formation that equips every member to love their neighbors with the genuine, sacrificial, other-directed love that makes the gospel credible in the contexts where it is proclaimed, and the missional formation that equips every member to understand their own daily life and their own social relationships as the specific context in which the commission is most immediately and most practically fulfilled for most of the community's members most of the time. The member who understands her workplace, her neighborhood, her family relationships, and her social connections as the specific sphere in which she is fulfilling the Great Commission is the member who has genuinely received the commission and is genuinely living under it.

Mark 16:15's formulation of the commission, 'Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation', establishes the universality of the mission in terms that leave no residual category of 'creation' that is not the community's concern. The commission is not merely to go to the accessible and the welcoming; it is to go to all the world and preach the gospel to all creation. This universality is not a counsel of despair; it is the expression of the commission's confidence that the authority behind it, all authority in heaven and on earth, is sufficient for all the world and all creation. The community that has genuinely received this commission will be a community permanently oriented outward, toward the world that has not yet heard, toward the nations that have not yet produced communities of disciples, and toward the return of the Lord who will complete what the commission has been advancing.

VII. MISSION AND CULTURAL ENGAGEMENT

Disciples as Salt and Light

A. The Primary Mission and Its Overflow

The relationship between the church's commission to make disciples and the broader cultural influence of faithful disciples is one of the most debated questions in contemporary missiology. Two distortions emerge. The first narrows the church's mission almost exclusively to the salvation of individuals, minimizing the social implications of lives transformed by the gospel. The second broadens the church's mission to include cultural transformation, social justice, and political advocacy in ways that risk displacing Christ's primary commission to make disciples. Biblical faithfulness requires holding both truths together: the church's mission is to proclaim the gospel and make disciples, while transformed disciples naturally influence the world around them.

The biblical account of the church's mission requires both the primary commission and its overflow, but it requires them in their proper relationship. The primary commission is to make disciples, to call all nations to repentance and faith in Jesus Christ and to form the new disciples in the knowledge and obedience of everything He commanded. This is the church's irreducible calling, the task that only the church is commissioned to perform, and the task that takes priority over every other activity. But the disciples who are genuinely made in this process are disciples whose lives are being transformed by the Spirit of the crucified and risen Christ, transformed in their relationships, their use of resources, their treatment of the vulnerable, their pursuit of justice, and their love for the neighbor who bears the image of God. The overflow of genuine discipleship into the cultural and social

dimensions of human life is not an optional addition to the primary commission; it is the inevitable fruit of the primary commission faithfully fulfilled.

Matthew 5:13-16's salt and light imagery establishes the relationship between the community's identity and its cultural influence with the clarity and the precision that the commission's full scope requires. Salt preserves, flavors, and prevents decay. Light illuminates, exposes, and enables navigation. The community that is genuinely the new covenant community, constituted by genuine faith, formed in genuine knowledge of God, maintained in genuine covenant accountability, gathered in genuine worship before the living God, is the community that is most genuinely salt and light in its cultural environment precisely because it is most genuinely what it is. The community that is genuinely different from its cultural environment does not need to pursue cultural influence as a separate missional strategy; its genuine difference is its cultural influence. The disciples made by the commission's primary task are the salt and light that the cultural engagement produces, and the first and most important contribution to any culture that the church can make is the making of genuine disciples within it.

B. The Great Commission and the Whole Series

This lesson stands at the penultimate position of the series, the second-to-last lesson in a thirty-lesson systematic theology of the church, because the mission is the theological destination toward which the entire ecclesiological project has been pointing. The church was not constituted, governed, sealed, disciplined, and gathered for its own enjoyment of the blessings of the covenant; it was constituted, governed, sealed, disciplined, and gathered to declare the excellencies of the One who called it out of darkness into His marvelous light (1 Peter 2:9). The community that has been formed through this entire series, in the covenant theology, the governance, the ordinances, the discipline, the worship, has been formed for the mission that this lesson describes. The formation serves the mission; the mission expresses the formation; and both together constitute the full life of the covenant community as the new covenant Scriptures describe it.

Lesson 29 will address the church and the world, how the community that is in the world but not of the world navigates the cultural engagement that the commission requires without being absorbed by the culture it is called to reach. Lesson 30 will bring the series to its doxological conclusion with the vision of the church triumphant, the bride of Christ adorned and ready, the multitude from every nation standing before the throne and before the Lamb, the eschatological worship of the fully gathered and fully glorified community of the redeemed. But between Lesson 28 and Lesson 30 lies the entire interim of the church's present commission: the commission that every gathering of the covenant community to worship is simultaneously preparing for and renewing the energy for, the commission that every dispersal of the covenant community back into the world is the specific enactment of. Go, therefore, and make disciples of all the nations. The risen Lord who has all authority in heaven and on earth will be with His community until the commission is complete.

“All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.”

Matthew 28:18–20, NASB 1995

Theological Terms and Definitions

Great Commission	Matthew 28:18-20: the risen Christ's comprehensive commissioning of the covenant community to make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the trinitarian name and teaching them to observe everything He commanded, grounded in His comprehensive authority and sustained by His promised presence. The single governing imperative (matheteusate, make disciples) with two participial means (baptizing, teaching). The church's appointed mission for the entire period between the resurrection and the parousia.
Matheteusate	The Greek aorist imperative translated 'make disciples' in Matthew 28:19. The only main imperative in the Great Commission's grammatical structure; the governing commission around which the other verbs (going, baptizing, teaching) are organized as means. Not 'make converts' or 'make decisions' but 'make disciples', individuals whose lives are being fundamentally oriented around the person, teaching, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, formed in the community of His followers.
Panta ta Ethne	Greek for 'all the nations' (Matthew 28:19). Not 'all the countries' or 'all the governments' but all the ethnolinguistic people groups of the earth, the specific cultural, linguistic, and tribal communities that constitute the human family. The fulfillment of the Abrahamic promise (Genesis 12:3: 'in you all the families of the earth will be blessed'). Connected to Matthew 24:14: the gospel must be preached to all nations before the end comes.
Acts 1:8	The companion commission to Matthew 28:18-20 in Luke's two-volume narrative: 'you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth.' The Spirit provides the commission's power; the geographic progression (Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, ends of the earth) describes both the historical advance of Acts' narrative and the structural description of every local church's simultaneous missional scope at all four levels.
Acts 13:1-3	The apostolic pattern for the local church as sending agency: the church at Antioch, gathered in worship and fasting, was instructed by the Spirit to set apart Barnabas and Saul. The church prayed, fasted, laid hands on them, and sent them out. Establishes: (1) the Spirit calls; (2) the church discerns the call; (3) the church commissions and sends; (4) the missionaries go as the community's sent representatives; (5) the missionaries report back to the sending church (Acts 14:27). The New Testament's normative pattern for mission as the local church's enterprise.
2 Corinthians 5:18-20	Paul's account of the church's commission in terms of reconciliation: 'God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and He has committed to us the word of reconciliation. Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ.' The 'word of reconciliation' is the specific content of the commission; the 'ambassadors for Christ' is the community's specific role, representing the sovereign who sent them, speaking not their own message but the message they have been given.
Disciple	A learner, follower, and committed student of a teacher whose way of life the disciple is deliberately adopting as his own. In the New Testament, discipleship to Jesus Christ is not a one-time decision but a way of life, a pattern of following, learning, obeying, and being increasingly conformed to the character of the One being followed. Contrasted with 'convert' (one who has made a decision) and 'member' (one who has joined an institution): a disciple is someone whose life is fundamentally oriented around the person, teaching, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.
Matthew 5:13-16	The salt and light passage establishing the relationship between the community's identity and its cultural influence: salt preserves, flavors, and prevents decay; light illuminates, exposes,

	and enables navigation. The community that is genuinely the new covenant community, genuinely different from its cultural environment, does not need to pursue cultural influence as a separate missional strategy; its genuine difference is its cultural influence. The disciples made by the commission's primary task are the salt and light that the cultural engagement produces.
Romans 10:14-15	Paul's account of the necessary chain connecting the unreached peoples' salvation and the church's sending: 'How will they call on Him in whom they have not believed? How will they believe in Him whom they have not heard? And how will they hear without a preacher? How will they preach unless they are sent? How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news.' The chain: unreached peoples cannot call without believing, cannot believe without hearing, cannot hear without a preacher, preacher cannot go without being sent. The local church's sending responsibility is the link in the chain that makes the hearing possible.
The End of the Age	Matthew 28:20: 'I am with you always, even to the end of the age.' The temporal qualifier of Christ's presence promise, establishing the commission's duration: the appointed mission for the entire period from the resurrection to the parousia. Connected to Matthew 24:14: 'this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all the nations, and then the end will come.' The commission has a beginning (resurrection/Pentecost), a scope (all nations), and an end (the return of Christ that the commission's completion precedes).

Practical Application

A. For the Mind: What Must We Believe?

We must believe that the Great Commission is the church's appointed mission for the entire period between the resurrection and the return of Christ, not a temporary historical assignment that has been superseded by more sophisticated models of Christian social engagement, and not an optional missional emphasis for the congregations with the most resources and the most adventurous members. It is the risen Lord's specific commission to the covenant community, issued under His comprehensive authority, sustained by His promised presence, and binding on every generation of the church until the end of the age. The congregation that has genuinely received this commission will not be a congregation that treats mission as one program among many in its institutional portfolio; it will be a congregation whose entire life is organized around the conviction that it exists, in part, to make disciples of all nations.

We must believe that the primary imperative of the commission is 'make disciples', not 'make decisions,' not 'make converts,' not 'win souls,' but make disciples. The difference is not merely semantic; it is the difference between a transaction and a transformation, between a moment and a life, between a decision and a direction. The congregation that has understood the commission's actual imperative will invest the same depth of theological seriousness and pastoral intentionality in the formation of its evangelistic fruit that it invests in the formation of its existing membership, because the disciples the commission calls for are disciples who will need everything the covenant community provides: the Word proclaimed, the ordinances administered, the discipline exercised, the worship sustained.

We must believe that Christ's promised presence, 'I am with you always, even to the end of the age', is the commission's most practically sustaining resource. The mission is hard, the opposition is real, the scope is vast, and the community's resources are finite. But the resource that is infinite, unreserved, and specifically promised for the commission's duration is the presence of the risen Lord who has all authority in heaven and on earth. The community that has genuinely received this promise will go into the mission field not with the anxiety of those who are uncertain about the outcome but with the confidence of those who know that the One who has all authority has promised to be with them always.

B. For the Heart: What Must We Feel and Desire?

We should feel a genuine missional compassion for those who have not yet heard the gospel, the specific people in this congregation's neighborhood, workplace, and social relationships who do not yet know the risen Christ, and the specific people groups of the unreached world for whom no one has yet been sent. This compassion is not a manufactured emotional state; it is the natural fruit of genuinely understanding what the alternative to receiving the gospel is and genuinely believing that the gospel is the only means through which that alternative is avoided.

We should feel a genuine sense of privilege at having been constituted as the community of the redeemed and commissioned as the community of the sent. The apostle Paul's account of his own missionary calling, 'For if I preach the gospel, I have nothing to boast of, for I am under compulsion; for woe is me if I do not preach the gospel' (1 Corinthians 9:16), expresses the combination of obligation and privilege that the genuine reception of the commission produces. The commission is not a burden; it is the most significant assignment on earth. And the

presence of the risen Lord who accompanies the mission is not merely a theological proposition; it is the personal fellowship of the most worthy companion any community engaged in any enterprise has ever had.

We should desire for this congregation to be genuinely and sacrificially engaged in fulfilling the Great Commission across the full scope of Acts 1:8—in our community, our region, our nation, and among the unreached peoples of the world. This is more than supporting a program, an annual conference, or a missions offering. It is the ongoing, prayerful, generous, and people-sending commitment of a church that has embraced Christ's commission and is determined to fulfill it.

C. For the Hands: What Must We Do?

- Read Matthew 28:16-20 carefully, noting the grammatical structure: all authority (verse 18), go and make disciples (verse 19a), baptizing (verse 19b), teaching (verse 20a), and the promise (verse 20b). Identify for each element: (a) what it establishes theologically; (b) what it requires practically of this congregation; and (c) what specific aspect of this congregation's current life most directly fulfills or falls short of fulfilling it. Bring your analysis to the next study session.
- Identify one specific person in your life, a neighbor, a coworker, a family member, who does not yet know the risen Christ. Commit to one specific, concrete act of missional engagement with that person in the next thirty days: a gospel conversation, an invitation to the congregation's worship, a demonstration of genuine care, or some other engagement that is both authentically relational and genuinely missional. Bring a report of that engagement to the next study session or to a fellow member of the congregation.
- Identify one unreached people group, a specific ethnolinguistic community with little or no evangelical presence, that this congregation could specifically adopt in prayer and potentially in financial support. Research the people group using missiological resources and bring a brief (one paragraph) account of the group's size, location, language, religious background, and current evangelical presence (or lack thereof) to the next study session. This exercise is itself an act of missional formation: the congregation that knows specifically who the unreached are will pray for them more specifically and support the mission to them more intentionally.
- Evaluate this congregation's current fulfillment of the local church's sending responsibilities: (a) Does the congregation have a process for identifying and forming those whom the Spirit may be calling to vocational missionary work? (b) Does the congregation financially support missionaries who are sent under its direct authority and accountability? (c) Does the congregation pray for missionaries and unreached peoples in its regular corporate worship? (d) Do supported missionaries report back to the congregation in ways that form the whole community in the missional vision? For each area, bring a specific, constructive suggestion for improvement to the next elder-led discussion.
- Read 2 Corinthians 5:17-20 this week as a meditation on the church's ambassadorial identity. Note especially Paul's description of the community as 'ambassadors for Christ, as though God were making an appeal through us.' An ambassador does not speak her own message; she speaks the message of the sovereign who sent her. She does not negotiate the message's terms; she declares its content. She does not seek the host nation's approval; she represents the authority and the appeal of the One who authorized her mission. How does this ambassadorial identity shape the specific ways in which this congregation and its individual members engage in the missional declaration that the commission requires?

Key Texts: *Matthew 28:18–20; Acts 1:8; 13:1–3; Romans 10:14–15; 2 Corinthians 5:18–20; Mark 16:15*

Study and Discussion Questions

Opening Question

- How does this congregation currently understand and practice its engagement with the Great Commission? Is the commission primarily understood as a program, a financial commitment, a calling for specialists, or as the fundamental orientation of the entire community? Has this lesson changed or clarified your understanding of what genuine commission-reception looks like?

Observation Questions (What Do the Texts Say?)

- Read Matthew 28:16-20. What does verse 18 claim about Christ's authority? What is the grammatical relationship between the four verbs (going, make disciples, baptizing, teaching), which is the main imperative and which are the participial means? What is the specific scope of the commission (verse 19)? What are the two means of disciple-making (verses 19b-20a)? What is the promise that closes the commission (verse 20b)?
- Read Acts 1:6-8. What question were the disciples asking (verse 6)? What does Christ redirect them to in verse 7? What two things does He promise in verse 8 (power and scope), and what is the relationship between them? How does the Acts 1:8 commission relate to the Matthew 28:19-20 commission?
- Read Acts 13:1-4. What was the church at Antioch doing when the Holy Spirit's instruction came (verse 2)? What was the instruction? What did the church do before sending Barnabas and Saul (verse 3)? What does Luke say about how they were sent (verse 4)? What does the relationship between verse 3 (the church's action) and verse 4 (the Spirit's sending) establish about the local church's role in missional sending?
- Read 2 Corinthians 5:18-20. What is the source of the reconciliation (verse 18)? What has God committed to the community (verse 18)? What specific title does Paul use for the community's missional identity (verse 20)? What is the specific appeal the ambassadors make on behalf of Christ (verse 20)? How does the ambassadorial identity change the way you understand the commission's content and the community's role in proclaiming it?
- Read Romans 10:14-17. List the chain of dependencies Paul identifies. For each link in the chain, identify the specific responsibility it implies for the local church. Which link in the chain is most directly the local church's unique responsibility, and which link is most directly the individual member's unique responsibility?

Interpretation Questions (What Does It Mean?)

- The lesson argues that 'make disciples' is the only main imperative in the Great Commission, and that the going, baptizing, and teaching are the means and manner of the disciple-making rather than independent imperatives. Does this grammatical observation carry the theological and practical significance that the lesson claims? How does making this grammatical observation the organizing principle of the commission change the way the congregation understands and practices its mission?
- The lesson distinguishes between a 'convert' and a 'disciple,' arguing that the commission's primary product is not conversions but disciples. Is this distinction persuasive? Is it possible to be a disciple without being a convert, or a convert without being a disciple? What does the distinction imply for the way a congregation evaluates the success of its evangelistic efforts?
- The lesson argues that the local church is the primary sending agency for the commission's fulfillment, against the alternative model of independent parachurch organizations. Is this argument persuasive? What

specific features of the Acts 13 pattern support the local church's primacy? What would be lost if the commission were fulfilled primarily through parachurch organizations with minimal local church involvement?

- The lesson identifies two distortions in the relationship between the primary commission (make disciples) and the broader cultural engagement (salt and light): the distortion that narrows the mission to eternal souls only, and the distortion that expands the mission to include cultural transformation at the expense of disciple-making. How does the salt-and-light imagery of Matthew 5:13-16 navigate between these two distortions? Is the lesson's resolution, primary commission first, cultural influence as its overflow, adequately grounded in the biblical account?
- The promise of Christ's presence ('I am with you always, even to the end of the age') is the commission's closing word. How does this promise specifically address the specific fears and discouragements that the mission's difficulty, opposition, and scope produce in the community that is genuinely engaged in it? Is this promise a sufficient resource for the mission as the lesson claims, or does the lesson overstate its practical sustaining power?

Application Questions (What Does It Demand of Us?)

- The lesson describes the congregation's specific responsibilities as a sending agency: identifying and forming those called to missionary work, financially supporting those sent out, sustained prayer for the mission, pastoral accountability for missionaries, and celebrating the mission's fruit in ways that form the whole congregation. Assess this congregation's current fulfillment of each responsibility. Which is most developed and which is most deficient? What is the single most actionable improvement the congregation could make in the next six months?
- The lesson argues that every member of the covenant community is a missional witness in her own sphere, her workplace, neighborhood, family relationships, and social connections. What would it look like for this congregation to provide the specific formation (theological, relational, and missional) that equips every member to understand her own daily life as the specific context in which she is most immediately fulfilling the Great Commission? What specific teaching or training resource would most directly provide this formation?
- The lesson observes that the congregation that has genuinely received the commission will allow the urgency of the unreached to shape its missional priorities, financial investments, and prayer life. Does this congregation's current allocation of missional resources, financial giving, prayer commitments, personnel sent, reflect the urgency of the unreached peoples who represent the commission's furthest horizon? What specific adjustment to the congregation's current missional investment would most directly honor the commission's 'all the nations' scope?
- Having now studied the Great Commission as the penultimate lesson of this entire series on the doctrine of the church, write a brief (one paragraph) integration of the mission with what has come before: how does the community constituted in Units 1-4, governed in Unit 5, sealed in Units 6-7, maintained in Unit 8, and gathered in Unit 9 serve the mission described in Unit 10? In other words, why does the church's internal life, its theology, governance, ordinances, discipline, and worship, matter for its external mission? Bring the integration to the next study session.

Prayer Focus

Begin by reading Matthew 28:18-20 aloud, slowly and with full weight: 'All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.' Read it again. The One speaking these words is the One who walked out of the tomb on the third day. He has all authority, over the culture that resists the gospel, over the government that opposes the church, over the spiritual powers that oppose the mission, over the hardness of human hearts that seems impervious to the Word. He commands: go and make disciples. He promises: I am with you always. There is no frontier in this world, no resistance in this culture, and no hardness in any human heart that stands outside the authority of the One who speaks these words. Let that truth ground the prayers that close this lesson.

Pray for this congregation's fulfillment of the Great Commission in all four dimensions of Acts 1:8. Pray for the congregation's witness in its immediate community (Jerusalem), for the specific conversations, specific relationships, and specific missional engagements that the members of this congregation are carrying with specific people who do not yet know the risen Christ. Pray for the congregation's witness in its broader region (Judea), for the communities within reach of this congregation's investment and presence that have not yet produced a genuine community of disciples. Pray for the congregation's engagement across cultural and social distance (Samaria), for the people in this congregation's context who are close in geography but distant in culture, social class, or ethnicity, and who need the gospel as urgently as anyone else but who are less likely to walk through the door of this congregation's Sunday gathering. And pray for the congregation's investment in the global mission to unreached peoples (the remotest part of the earth), for the specific people groups and the specific missionaries that the congregation supports and for the Spirit's work to produce communities of disciples among them.

Pray the prayer of Romans 10:15: 'How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news of good things.' Pray for those in this congregation and in the broader church who are being called to the vocational missionary work that the unreached peoples most need: for the clarity of the Spirit's call, for the courage to follow it, for the formation that will equip them to cross cultural frontiers with the gospel's full content and with the cultural competence and the personal character that cross-cultural disciple-making requires. Pray for the institutions, mission agencies, seminary training programs, sending churches, whose combined work forms and sends those whose feet will be beautiful because they bring the good news to those who have not yet heard it. And pray for the congregation's own role as a sending community: that it would identify those being called, form them faithfully, send them with genuine prayer and financial support, and maintain with them the pastoral accountability that the Acts 13 pattern requires.

Close with the promise that the commission closes with: 'I am with you always, even to the end of the age.' Receive this promise specifically, with the specific fears and the specific discouragements that the commission's difficulty produces in the congregation that is genuinely engaged in it. The culture is resistant; I am with you. The opposition is real; I am with you. The unreached peoples are vast; I am with you. The resources are finite; I am with you. The commission seems impossibly large; I am with you, the One who has all authority in heaven and on earth, and to whose kingdom this commission belongs. Pray the commission's prayer, which is not a request for permission or a plea for favorable circumstances but the prayer of a community that has received its commission, trusts its Commander, and is asking only for the courage, the wisdom, and the faithfulness to go where it has been sent.

and to make the disciples it has been commissioned to make. To the risen Lord who speaks the commission belongs the authority; to the community that receives it belongs the obedience; and to the God who will bring it to completion belongs all the glory.

“Now to Him who is able to do far more abundantly beyond all that we ask or think, according to the power that works within us, to Him be the glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations forever and ever. Amen.”

Ephesians 3:20–21, NASB 1995

Key Texts: Matthew 28:18–20; Acts 1:8; 13:1–3; Romans 10:14–15; 2 Corinthians 5:18–20; Mark 16:15

Soli Deo Gloria
To God Alone Be the Glory

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