

Thy Kingdom Come

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The Great Commission and the Coming Kingdom: Matthew 28:18-20

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ABSTRACT:

This paper argues that God has a plan and purpose for the conclusion of our present age. This future will not be ethereal or *non-descript* as Scripture outlines coming prophetic events with great detail and specificity. Dr. Glaser, in a thorough exposition of Matt 28:18-20, concludes that Jesus linked the proclamation of the Gospel with His second coming by commanding His disciples to make disciples throughout world “*until the end of the age.*”

Therefore, Jesus and the disciples were very concerned about the World to Come and Dr. Glaser suggests that the future hope of a literal Messianic kingdom is woven into the very core of both Testaments but presently minimized by a rising eschatological cynicism within the today’s church.

Dr. Glaser develops the task given to the disciples known as the Great Commission through a careful exegesis of the text and discussion of the first century Jewish understanding of what it meant to “make disciples. Further, Glaser demonstrates that the term *συντελείας* used in Matt 28:20 and in 24:3 and translated as “end” would best viewed as the consummation of a series of eschatological events surrounding the second coming of Jesus. Glaser dismisses the notion that the “end of the age, as the phrase is so often translate should be understood by today’s disciples as simple words of comfort or a conclusion to what has gone before, but rather to an unfolding of “end times” events inclusive of the restoration of Israel, various eschatological judgments and the penultimate return of Christ.

Dr. Glaser argues that Jesus encouraged the disciples to look towards the events of the *συντελείας*, the consummation of the age, thereby creating a greater sense of urgency and providing the motivation for fulfilling the Commission. He further suggests that when the events of the future are de-literalized and downplayed that the burden for bringing the Gospel to those without Jesus is diminished.

INTRODUCTION

It can be quite frightening to think about the future – especially if you read the Bible and take it literally! The more romanticized happy ending we all love in literature, theater and the movies is simply not part of the divine script for human history. The future will be unyielding and selective as it holds good news for some and bad news for others. How harshly this falls on our 21st century ears. Yet, it is true!

Jesus calls us to be engaged, but not overly attached to our very temporary existence on earth. Believers, like everyone else, tend to

embrace the world’s dream of a better life - to live longer, to enjoy a “no worries” mentality, to live for the moment, to change what we can on earth and to not become overly concerned with the future. We sometimes behave as if God has given the future to man to control and shape as we see fit.

We know that our Messiah wants us to join Him in being crucified daily, forsaking the things of this passing planet to follow Him in obedience to all He has taught. But, it is hard to let go of this world as this existence is all

we know! Admittedly, we have a difficult time trusting the Lord today, nevertheless tomorrow. Yet, the future God planned for us before the foundations of the earth is inevitable and coming soon.

Humanity is not meandering through the ages, as God has a plan and purpose for the conclusion of our present age. This future will not be ethereal or *non-descript* and is outlined with great detail and specificity in Scripture. It will include a full itinerary of events that cannot be avoided. Rather than remaining passive participants in the future God has prepared for humanity, we should study the Scriptures and discover what He has planned and so that we may take an active role in the plan.

As one of our best-known modern day *Jewish prophets*, Bob Dylan wrote,

... [L]ike a thief in the night, he'll replace
wrong with right
When he returns.
... Will I ever learn that there'll be no
peace, that the war won't cease.
Until He returns.
... Of every earthly plan that be known to
man, He is unconcerned
He's got plans of his own to set up
His throne
When He returns.¹

The future God has planned for the world is unstoppable!

Today, many thoughtful Evangelicals gravitate towards a more undefined view of the future, spiritualizing the kingdom message of the Old Testament prophets. We tend to take the Bible's teaching about the future less literally than in previous years. We say, "Thy kingdom come", but have only a minimal understanding of the kingdom we expect.

¹ <http://www.azlyrics.com/lyrics/bobdylan/whenhereturns.html> from Slow Train Coming, Lyrics and Music by Bob Dylan.

In fact, eschatological or "end times" agnosticism is more common today than digging deeply in Scripture to find out what God has in store for those who love Him and His Word. Perhaps we have overemphasized the coming kingdom in the past? The current emphasis within the Church over the last few decades encouraging believers to do what is possible to alleviate present suffering and injustice is positive, this focus on the present tends to obfuscate the teaching of Scripture about our future hope. We behave as if nurturing a future hope is less godly and appositional to working towards a better present.

Unfortunately, the church has become imbalanced, not realizing that our sure hope for the future is what Scripture provides to strengthen our efforts to transform the ungodly structures of a fallen world and comfort those suffering in its wake. We often quote the Sermon on the Mount to undergird our concern for the present when Jesus says,

"So do not worry about tomorrow; for tomorrow will care for itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own. (Matthew 6:34)

However, using this text to minimize or lessen the significance of God's plan for the future in Scripture is a misunderstanding of the text. Jesus never avoided the future! In Matthew 6, the Lord is simply telling us to trust God with our tomorrows and to believe that He will provide for our needs as we "seek first His kingdom". The Lord is not telling us to ignore the future. In fact, He says the opposite in Matthew 24:32-33,

"Now learn the parable from the fig tree: when its branch has already become tender and puts forth its leaves, you know that summer is near; so, you too, when you see all these things, recognize that He is near, right at the door.

Knowing more about our biblical future and the coming kingdom is one of our duties as disciples of Jesus the Messiah. We are not only part of God's today, but we also have starring roles in His forever story! We must discover what He has planned to the best of our ability and allow the future to inform the way we live and serve in the present.

This is precisely why He addressed the future as part of what we term the Great Commission. What we do today in obedience to Jesus only makes sense in light of the future that awaits us. The Savior calls His disciples to live today in light of tomorrow.

We recognize that our days are numbered and understand that life, as we know it will soon end. We also believe that we have little time left to let the world know what Jesus has taught us; about salvation, the abundant life and His plan for the future.

Jesus teaches His disciples that the "end of the age" is as certain as His death and resurrection. Should we then concern ourselves with the details? Of course! As His disciples we should not trivialize what mattered so profoundly to our Savior. If so, we demonstrate that we have not learned, followed and observed what he taught, thereby denying the very *teaching* He called us to pass along.

If we are not telling people about the end of the age then we are not doing what Jesus instructed us to do. Perhaps we do not want to embarrass God or be viewed as fanatics on a soapbox in Hyde Park or as Americans would imagine, standing in the middle of a busy urban center with a cheeseboard sign hanging on our bodies announcing that the end is near? Yet, it is this recognition of our temporal nature and of our few remaining days on earth that compels us to reflect upon the *Great Commission in Light of the Coming Kingdom*. I have come

to believe that it is impossible to fulfill the Saviors directions to "Go" in Matthew 28:19-20 without powerful motivation. It is this hope of His coming and His reminder of what He has planned for us that will motivate His disciples to carry out this holy Commission. The day is coming when we will run out of time to fulfill the *Commission* He has given us and it is for this reason that the Jesus links the Great Commission to the future He planned before the foundations of the earth.

I hope to explore this link between the Great Commission and the coming Kingdom. In doing so I have chosen to quote liberally from a series of messages given by the great expositor and Christian leader, John Stott who thought deeply about the Great Commission. He is considered the father of the Lausanne Consultation on World Evangelism and as a local pastor had a great heart for world missions. This series of messages were given at the Berlin Consultation on World Evangelism in 1966. However, his words are as gripping today as they were more than a half-century ago.

I had the joy of spending time with John Stott at the Lausanne Younger leaders conference, held in Singapore in 1987 and was impressed by his humility, grasp of the word and his evident love for Lord and for the Jewish people. It is with deep appreciation for his teaching and ministry that I refer to his comments in Berlin.

COMMON UNDERSTANDINGS OF THE GREAT COMMISSION

The text in its purest form is found in Matthew 28:18-20, where the Savior issues His last set of standing orders to His disciples prior to the ascension,

And Jesus came up and spoke to them, saying, " 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.

Speaking to a the Berlin Congress on World Evangelism in 1966, John Stott, wrote,

The so-called “Great Commission” or “Universal Commission” occurs five times in our Bibles, at the end of each of the four Gospels and once at the beginning of the Acts. There is no need to suppose that these are five versions of a single occasion. It is much more probable that, during the forty days which elapsed between the Resurrection and the Ascension, the risen Lord repeated the same commission many times, although in different words and with different emphases.²

The commission is found in various texts in the New Testament³, but we will focus on the statement found in Matthew 28:18-20.

Stott affirms,

For, in the last resort, we engage in evangelism today, not because we want to or because we choose to or because we like to, but because we have been told to. The Church is under orders. The risen Lord has commanded us to “go,” to “preach,” to make disciples;” and that is enough for us. *Evangelistic inactivity is disobedience*. It is, therefore, right for us to go back to the very beginning and re-examine our marching orders.⁴

Allow me then to summarize the various views Christians hold regarding what we usually entitle, the *Great Commission* – our marching

orders!

Marv Newell, Senior Vice President with *Missio Nexus*, a fellowship of Mission agencies reduces the various statements of the Great Commission into four helpful points, in his book, *Commissioned*.

In the Great Commission Jesus calls for; a worthy messenger, a certain message, a clear strategy, an ultimate goal – world evangelization⁵

John Stott views the Great Commission as the carrying out of Jesus’ command to go and do three things; make disciples, baptize and teach.

Christ used three verbs: “make disciples,” “baptize,” and “teach.” Some scholars interpret this as a single command to “go and make disciples;” “baptizing them” and “teaching them” they consider the explanation of how disciples are made. I prefer to take the three verbs separately as descriptions of three distinct parts or stages of the one Great Commission of Christ to “go.”⁶

One can already see from a cursory reading of these comments that there is considerable agreement on what the Great Commission is all about. The instructions are fairly clear. Jesus, after His resurrection and just prior to His ascension, calls upon the eleven to “go” out from their usual surroundings reaching the world with the message of the Gospel. The strategy and call to action is to carry out three or four tasks, depending on how you divide them; to make disciples, *to baptize these disciples and then to teach them everything the Savior taught us and to help the new disciples to be obedient to what they have learned*.

2 <http://www2.wheaton.edu/bgc/archives/docs/Berlin66/stott1.htm> August 2014.

3 Matthew 28:16-20 Mark 16:15-18, Luke 24:44-49, John 20:19-23, and Acts 1:6-8.

4 Ibid.

5 *Commissioned: What Jesus Wants You to Know as You Go*, Marvin J. Newell ChurchSmart Resources, 2010, 182 pp. in the book review by David Mays, <http://www.davidmays.org/BN/NewComm.html> August 2014.

6 Ibid Stott, Berlin.

Chris Wright, British missiologist, Old Testament theologian and International Ministries Director of the Langham Partnership, comments extensively on the nature of the Great Commission in his excellent article, *Integral Mission and the Great Commission "The Five Marks of Mission."*

Wright both simplifies and yet expands the scope of the Commission. He takes the *Five Marks of Mission*, adopted by the Lambeth Conference of Bishops in 1988⁷ and reduces them to three.

1. To proclaim the good news of the Kingdom
2. To teach, baptize and nurture new believers
3. To respond to human need by loving service
4. To seek to transform unjust structures of society
5. To strive to safeguard the integrity of creation and to sustain the life of the earth.⁸

Wright comments,

However, I prefer to keep things simpler and we can do that by grouping four of the five into two pairs, putting evangelism and teaching together, and putting compassion and justice together. That then creates three major missional tasks, or three focal points for our missional engagement: church, society and creation. Our mission, then, include:

1. Building the church (through evangelism and teaching), bringing people to repentance, faith and obedience as disciples of Jesus Christ.
2. Serving society (through compassion and justice), in response to Jesus sending us 'into the world', to love and serve, to be salt and light, to do good, and to 'seek the welfare' of the people around us (as Jeremiah told the Israelites in Babylon, Jer. 29:7).
3. Caring for creation (through godly use of the resources of creation along with ecological concern and action), fulfilling

the very first 'great commission' given to humanity in Genesis 1 and 2.⁹

Wright argues that the basis for his inclusion of serving society and caring for creation in the mission of the church is based upon the words of Jesus in Matthew 28:20 where He states, *teaching them to observe all that I commanded you* and therefore his points 2 and 3 flow from the expanse of Jesus' teaching in the Scripture and are not explicitly stated in our text.

I believe adding these more expansive elements as summarized by Wright¹⁰ or any attempt to merge the various emphases of our Messiah's teaching into the Great Commission is unnecessary as the *commission* focuses on what the disciples are to do and not on the specifics of the curriculum which are expansive, **πάντα** ὅσα ἐνετειλάμην ὑμῖν.

I am concerned about delineating priorities from Jesus' teaching and including these as part of the Great Commission. This effort moves us beyond the text and may be viewed as imposing the *mood of our day* upon the words of the Savior, though the priorities Wright chooses are certainly important. I prefer a broader interpretation of the Great Commission in defining the mission of the church. In the text, Jesus did not summarize or prioritize what the disciples were to know and obey and so Wright's selections appear to be arbitrary and reveal his priorities more than those of the Savior – as critical as Wright's priorities are for the church today.

I believe this is why Jesus kept the commission broad. He may have been concerned that we would promote some of His commands and minimize others.

⁷ pp. 4-5.

⁸ <http://www.loimission.net/wp-content/uploads/2014/03/Chris-Wright-IntegralMissionandtheGreatCommission.pdf> pp. 4-5.

⁹ Ibid p. 6.

¹⁰ Wright's influence has profoundly influenced the global church through his role as the Chairman of the Theological Commission of the Lausanne movement.

THE CONTEXT OF THE PASSAGE

It is important to remember that the Great Commission was given on the mountain (Matthew 28:16) after the resurrection, perhaps immediately preceding the ascension as was the case with Luke 24:45-49 and Acts 1:6-11. Additionally, we note that the commission was given to the “11” and not, at least in this case, to the broader group of disciples.

As was the case in Acts 1:8, the commission to go out was linked to Jesus’ death, resurrection and to His second coming. Clearly, the commission was the job description given to the disciples to pursue until Jesus returned. The commission revealed the work of the disciples in the interim period between His first and second comings.

This promise to return was clearly viewed as being more immediate by the 11 than by today’s disciples who have been waiting for two thousands years! Therefore, the words of Jesus fell upon eager ears tagged with an urgency we have lost today. The disciples were given a task needing to be completed in what was probably understood as a very short amount of time. Weeks, months, and years – we cannot be certain, but evidently the disciples believed they would see Jesus again very soon.

AN ANALYSIS OF THE TEXT

We notice that the Saviors authority and the command to go, make disciples, baptize, teach, etc. are linked together by literary style and grammar.¹¹ I would agree with Stott and other

11 Matthew may intend Jesus’ words to be understood as arranged in a chiasm around the baptism statement in v. 19b. Balanced around this will be the discipling (v. 19a) and teaching statements (v. 20a), and around these in

commentators that Jesus joined these critical elements into a cohesive strategy formulated in the Great Commission. We will therefore briefly examine each aspect of the commission.

Once again, it is helpful to read the passage as begin now to explore the details of the commission.

And Jesus came up and spoke to them, saying, “ 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.¹²

HIS MESSIANIC AUTHORITY

Jesus proclaims,

All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. (ἐδόθη μοι πᾶσα ἐξουσία ἐν οὐρανῷ καὶ ἐπὶ [τῆς] γῆς)

The Great Commission flows from the divine authority granted to Jesus, expressed in this prolegomena to the Commission. What then is the link between the authority of Jesus held prior to this moment and this new moment that causes Jesus to begin the statement of the Commission by mentioning that “all authority” being given to Him? Was there a change that should be noted and one that impacts His Commissioning of the disciples?

turn the statements about authority (v. 18b) and presence (v. 20b) Nolland, J. (2005). *The Gospel of Matthew: a commentary on the Greek text*. Grand Rapids, MI; Carlisle: W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press. p.1264.

12 καὶ προσελθὼν ὁ Ἰησοῦς ἐλάλησεν αὐτοῖς λέγων ἐδόθη μοι πᾶσα ἐξουσία ἐν οὐρανῷ καὶ ἐπὶ [τῆς] γῆς. πορευθέντες οὖν μαθητεύσατε πάντα τὰ ἔθνη, βαπτίζοντες αὐτοὺς εἰς τὸ ὄνομα τοῦ πατρὸς καὶ τοῦ υἱοῦ καὶ τοῦ ἁγίου πνεύματος, διδάσκοντες αὐτοὺς τηρεῖν πάντα ὅσα ἐνετειλάμην ὑμῖν· καὶ ἰδοὺ ἐγὼ μεθ’ ὑμῶν εἰμι πάσας τὰς ἡμέρας ἕως τῆς συντελείας τοῦ αἰῶνος.

I believe that there was a profound change and that new and greater authority was given to Jesus and thereby passed along to the disciples! First of all, the work of redemption is now complete as He died as a ransom for sin. Secondly, He resurrected from the grave, conquering sin and death showing that even though the Jewish people rejected him as the promised Messianic King, He did, fulfill an additional array of prophecies – specifically Isaiah 53.

Was it not necessary for the Christ to suffer these things and to enter into His glory?" Then beginning with Moses and with all the prophets, He explained to them the things concerning Himself in all the Scriptures. (Luke 24:26-27)

Therefore, His kingly authority is not based upon His accession to the Davidic throne or upon Israel's acceptance of His right to rule. Jesus is Israel's king and Savior of the world according to the will His Father's and obedience as the divine Son, vindicated by the resurrection of the dead, as Paul describes in Romans 1:2-6, as Jesus *was declared the Son of God by the resurrection from the dead*.

Finally, because the risen Messiah was given all authority, which now includes πάντα τὰ ἔθνη, *all nations*, as the intended audience for the message borne by the disciples now significantly changes. This good news would no longer be limited to Israel but proclaimed to the nations of the world. This is a change in instructions from the Gospels (Matthew 10:5) and affirms Jesus' fulfillment of the prophecy in Daniel chapter 7 of the divine Son of Man.

"I kept looking in the night visions, And behold, with the clouds of heaven One like a Son of Man was coming, And He came up to the Ancient of Days And was presented before Him. "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. (Daniel 7:13-14)

John Nolland in his commentary on the Book of Matthew adds,

It seems, then, that Mt. 28:18 is most likely to represent a reaffirmation of authority after the rejection of Jesus by the Jerusalem authorities which led to his death. Through resurrection God has vindicated Jesus, who is now able to freshly affirm his authority.¹³

Therefore, in light of His rejection, death, resurrection and ascension, Daniel 7 can now be better understood as falling into the "body of prophecies" speaking of His second coming, the establishment of the kingdom on earth and fulfillment of the many other *second coming* prophecies especially Isaiah 9:7 where the prophet writes,

There will be no end to the increase of His government or of peace, On the throne of David and over his kingdom, To establish it and to uphold it with justice and righteousness From then on and forevermore. The zeal of the Lord of hosts will accomplish this.

Jesus was raised from rejection as the Messianic and Davidic King and granted authority over Israel and the nations, alluding to His fulfilling the Abrahamic covenant. However, this does not diminish the hope of a literal Davidic kingdom, it only postpones it as even in this final reminder to His disciples of His Messianic authority, the immanence of His return to reign as King is implicitly stated. He would still establish the literal throne of David on earth upon His return, with all of the concomitant

¹³ Nolland John. (2005). Preface. In *The Gospel of Matthew: a commentary on the Greek text* (p. 1265). Grand Rapids, MI; Carlisle: W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press.

blessings for the nations (Genesis 12:3).

He did not lose authority because of Israel's rejection, rather His authority was expanded on the basis of His "finished work" on the cross and resurrection from the dead. His authority extends beyond Israel to the nations as He came as the King of Israel, but died, rose and ascended as Lord of all nations. In effect, His passion rather than His conquests in the traditional sense led to His receiving "all authority" and the passing along of this authority over both Israel and the Gentiles to His disciples. His death did not make Him less of a king as in fact; it made Him a greater King with a broader empire.

The authority the disciples now receive is linked to the power of the Holy Spirit to accomplish the task (Luke 24: 48-49, Acts 1:8) and to His present and future rule as the Messianic Davidic King over Israel and the nations.

As John Stott so eloquently concludes more than a half a century ago,

The fundamental basis of all Christian missionary enterprise is the universal authority of Jesus Christ, "in heaven and on earth." If the authority of Jesus were circumscribed on earth, if He were but one of many religious teachers, one of many Jewish prophets, one of many divine incarnations, we would have no mandate to present Him to the nations as the Lord and Saviour of the world. If the authority of Jesus were limited in heaven, if He had not decisively overthrown the principalities and powers, we might still proclaim Him to the nations, but we would never be able to "turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God" (Acts 26:18). Only because all authority on earth belongs to Christ are we to go to all nations. And only because all authority in heaven as well is His have we any hope of success. It must have seemed ridiculous to send that tiny nucleus of Palestinian peasants to win the world for Christ. For Christ's

Church today, so hopelessly outnumbered by hundreds of millions who neither know nor acknowledge Him, the task is equally gigantic. It is the unique, the universal authority of Jesus Christ which gives us both the right and the confidence to seek to make disciples of all the nations. Before His authority on earth the nations must bow; before His authority in heaven no demon can stop them.¹⁴

THE COMMAND TO GO

The first part of the Commission is an appeal to the disciples by Jesus "to go"!

Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations. (**πορευθέντες οὖν μαθητεύσατε πάντα τὰ ἔθνη.**)

There have been endless discussions as to whether or not the "Go" should be translated as an imperative. Most English translations simply use the word "go" and do not try to "squeeze" more from the Greek.¹⁵ Though the participle is not an imperative, it can take on the quality of command as the following verb, *μαθητεύσατε*, which is dominant in the sentence, is an imperative.¹⁶ It is understandable why so many think the "go" is a command, but this is

14 <http://www2.wheaton.edu/bgc/archives/docs/Berlin66/stott2.htm> August 2014.

15 If the correct sense of the aorist participle in Matthew 28:19 is "as you go," one wonders why no translation brings this out? Every translation consulted translates the participle as a definite command "go." These translations include KJV, NKJV, ASV, RSV, NSAB, NIV, TNIV, ESV, TEV, CEV, Philip's Translation, The Living Bible, The Amplified New Testament, The Jerusalem Bible, NAB (i.e., The Catholic Bible). It is possible that some of these translations translated the participle as a command by accident, or ignorance. However, it is unlikely that the major translations listed above were ignorant of the Greek grammar when translating into the English. (<http://www.faithandreasonforum.com/index.asp?PageID=16&ArticleID=536> August 20, 2014)

16 <https://www.teknia.com/greek-dictionary/matheteuo>.

only true by way of implication and attachment to the participle to *make disciples*.

The verb, πορευθέντες “to go” is an aorist passive participle plural and this form of the verb has caused many debates and impacted the mission strategy of many. The participle could have the sense of “after having gone”, “once you have left,” or “even while you are on the way” etc. There is a presumption that the disciples would be on their way to bring the message of Jesus to the world.

Therefore the call to action would emphasize what the disciples should do as they go and not emphasize the call to “go” as if it is a decision to be made. This is also not completely clear from the text, but seems to be a strong possibility and at the least, the translation “having gone”, would certainly be acceptable to most scholars¹⁷.

So, there is an assumption on Jesus’ part that the disciples would be on their way, and the commission defines what they should do as they go. In other words, they would be leaving their homes in pursuit of the mission of “making disciples of all the nations”. This makes sense as one could hardly disciple the nations by staying in one geographic area!

Craig Blomberg brings a healthy balance to these discussions regarding πορευθέντες as he suggests caution is using Jesus’ call to the disciples to “go” as somehow elevating foreign missions over serving the Lord wherever the Lord has placed you.

He writes,

Too much is made of it when the disciples’ “going” is overly subordinated, so that Jesus’ charge is to proselytize merely where one is. Matthew frequently uses “go” as an introductory circumstantial participle that is rightly translated as coordinate to the main verb—here “Go and make” (cf. 2:8; 9:13; 11:4; 17:27; 28:7). Too little is

made of it when all attention is centered on the command to “go,” as in countless appeals for missionary candidates, so that foreign missions are elevated to a higher status of Christian service than other forms of spiritual activity. To “make disciples of all nations” does require many people to leave their homelands, but Jesus’ main focus remains on the task of all believers to duplicate themselves wherever they may be.¹⁸

I agree that these two potential avenues for fulfilling the Great Commission should be kept in balance; moving cross culturally – which can also mean “staying where you are”, especially today where we have the opportunity to serve so many different people groups in major urban areas. Or, on the other hand, *going* in the traditional foreign missions sense – a ministry that is still needed, especially for those who are humble and able to serve nationals leading movements within their own culture, country and language groups.

Either way, Jesus is explicitly clear in commanding His disciples to disciple others whether they go to a new place, invest their lives in a local foreign culture or remain where they are. Disciples are responsible to disciple others without restriction of culture, ethnicity, geography or language.

THE INCLUSION OF THE GENTILES

It is worth further exploring the expansion of the commission to non-Jews in some greater depth. As mentioned, Jesus calls the disciples to go beyond the physical seed of Abraham and to *make disciples* among the Gentiles. As Yeshua said, *make disciples of all the nations* (πάντα

¹⁷ <http://www.teknia.com/greekexercise/12-8-t>.

¹⁸ Blomberg, C. (1992). *Matthew* (Vol. 22, p. 431). Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers.

τὰ ἔθνη).¹⁹

Prior to this post resurrection command to include the nations, the disciples were told to limit their ministries to the Jewish people. Matthew writes,

These twelve Jesus sent out after instructing them: “Do not go in the way of the Gentiles, and do not enter any city of the Samaritans; but rather go to the lost sheep of the house of Israel but rather go to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. And as you go, preach, saying, ‘The kingdom of heaven is at hand.’ (Matthew 10:5-7)

Later on Matthew records the healing of a Gentile girl by Jesus (Matthew 22:24-26), but describes this miracle as an exception to His mission among the Jewish people.

But He answered and said, “I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.” But she came and began to bow down before Him, saying, “Lord, help me!” And He answered and said, “It is not good to take the children’s bread and throw it to the dogs.

Julius Scott, former New Testament professor at Wheaton College, suggests that the restriction to the Jewish people was not because of any first century ethnocentrism but rather because Jesus respected the plan of God outlined in the Old Testament that described different stages in the unfolding of God’s plan for the world and varying roles for both Jews and Gentiles. He indicates that the inclusion of the Gentiles in Matthew is part of the more general eschatological emphasis of Matthew. This redirection to preach to the Gentiles in Matthew 28:19-20 is another additional signal

19 Though it often emphasized the judgment that would fall on the Gentile oppressors of God’s people, OT eschatology also had a very positive place for Gentiles in God’s ultimate purposes. See, e.g., Pss. 87; 96; Is. 2:2-4; 42:1, 6; 49:6; 66:19-20; Mic. 4:2-3; Zc. 8:20-23. Nolland p.1266 footnote.

of the importance of the *age to come* with the preaching of the Gospel in our present age. It is impossible to separate what we have been called to do with what God has planned for the future.

Scott writes,

The answer to the question is to be found in a proper understanding of the way God works at various stages of salvation history. God’s offer of salvation to accept the unworthy, His promise that “I will be your God and you shall be my people,” is to all, but it is to be mediated through his chosen people. Jesus words and deeds in Matthew 10 and Matthew 15 show His awareness of the need to make the offer of salvation first to Israel to call it into being the renewed people of God who will then communicate that message to others. It was a procedure that had been firmly fixed in the Old Testament and understood by at least some of Jesus’ contemporaries. These words and deeds demonstrate a keen sense of Jesus part of what was appropriate in this stage of salvation history in which He lived. His healing and ministry to the Gentile demoniacs, the Centurion’s servant, a Samaritan woman and leper, and other non-Jews is the first fruits of a larger ingathering that shows His compassion for individuals was not restricted.²⁰

We should read the Gospel of Matthew and the life of Jesus as a story, with an introduction beginning and end along with plot twists throughout the narrative. The shift, which took place in Matthew chapter 12 at His rejection by Israel’s leaders, initiates His minimizing further discussion of establishing a physical kingdom. The evident agenda for His first coming now focuses on rejection, death, resurrection and the literal kingdom He came to establish in Israel is moved to the future, subsequent to this

20 J. Julius Scott Jr., Gentiles and the Ministry of Jesus: Further Observations on Matthew 10:5-6, 15:21-28. The Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society 33/2 (June 1990) 161-169.

predicted passion

Note the change in chapter 16:20-21 where Matthew records,

Then He warned the disciples that they should tell no one that He was the Christ. From that time Jesus began to show His disciples that He must go to Jerusalem, and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised up on the third day.

Jesus presented the Good News to His own people but was rejected by the leadership. Within the context and story line of the Gospel of Matthew, we see Jesus respond and by setting His mind on the cross (Isaiah 53 etc.) leaving the fulfillment of the many remaining kingdom promises pertaining to Israel for His return. These kingdom promises were given to the Jewish people and the Gentiles as the prophets wrote extensively about the role of the nations in the eschatological Kingdom of God (Amos Isaiah 42: 1-12, 9:9-15 etc.).²¹

However, there is an implied delay in the fulfillment of these promises made explicit by Jesus in the Olivet Discourse (Matthew 24-25, Mark 13, Luke 21). It was not as if Jesus would die and rise and the earthly Kingdom would immediately appear. There are many hints, warning His disciples of a delay, though again, the length of the delay would certainly have been deemed shorter in the minds of the disciples than we understand 2,000 years later.

There are two statements Jesus made during the Olivet discourse, one recorded in Luke 21 and the other in Matthew 24 that are critical to our understanding of a shift marking the inclusion the Gentiles as part of the Commission and the future, literal kingdom. In Luke 21, Jesus says,

and they will fall by the edge of the sword, and will be led captive into all the nations; and Jerusalem will be trampled under foot by the Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled.

Jesus informs His disciples of a change of seasons coming whereby the Gentiles will be included in God's present focus and for a time will be dominant in the same way Israel was dominant in the previous age. Yet, this time would be temporary, as the promises God made to the Jewish people that they will again become a nation, with their own land ruled by an enthroned Savior, would still come to pass.

Further in Matthew 24:14, Jesus says,

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.²²

The shift is obvious. Israel's rejection of Jesus as King and Messiah caused a "predicted" change in His ministry that led to an intensified focus on His death for sin, the description of the expected literal kingdom as future and the inclusion of the Gentiles in God's greater plan.

However, *Gentile inclusion would not precipitate Israel's exclusion*²³ or "replace" the Jewish people with the Gentiles as in his earliest promises to Abram, both Jews and Gentiles were included in His redemptive purposes. His death, resurrection and ascension to His Father's right hand would continue until a sovereignly selected moment when He returns to establish His literal Davidic kingdom and throne amidst a repentant Israel and obedient community of Gentiles.

²² In this instance Jesus describes the end by using the term *καὶ τότε ἔξει τὸ τέλος*.

²³ I am grateful to my often co-editor Dr. Darrell Bock for this wonderful turn of phrase.

²¹ See the article by Walter Kasier, <http://thepromise.typepad.com/197706.pdf>.

Peter describes this phasing in of the Kingdom in this way,

Therefore repent and return, so that your sins may be wiped away, in order that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord; and that He may send Jesus, the Christ appointed for you, whom heaven must receive until the period of restoration of all things about which God spoke by the mouth of His holy prophets from ancient time. (Acts 3:19-21)

If this promise of Peter is taken literally, there is no question that His return to establish this kingdom is viewed by the earliest Apostles as a certain hope and would be precipitated by the turning of the Jewish people to Jesus. We do not know when He is coming but we do understand from Peter's appeal the basis upon which He would return. This turning of the Jewish people to Jesus would precipitate the return of Christ.

We should not be surprised that Jesus calls upon His disciples, a remnant representing a renewed Israel (Romans 11:5) and precursor to the faithful Israel of the future (Romans 11:11-15) to do what God had called the Jewish people to do in the past; to bring His blessings to the nations. The inclusion of Gentiles into the Kingdom would therefore not start when Jesus returns but would begin immediately and lead to the day when both Jews and Gentiles become joyful citizens of the Kingdom of God. This is foreshadowed in today's church and expanded at the return of the Lord.

The presence of the church made up of redeemed Jews and Gentiles should not detract from the eschatological establishment of a literal kingdom, as God's plan for the planet would be fulfilled incrementally.

The *eleven* are called to disciple the nations, initiating in part, the culmination of His promises to both Jews and Gentiles, built upon the bedrock of the Abrahamic covenant (Genesis

12:1-3), with Jesus as the chief cornerstone! The disciples are called to preach to all in light of His soon coming and the Great Commission is simply one additional step towards the future God has planned for mankind.

Finally, we must understand that the shift within the Gospel of Matthew from a focus on Jewish people to non-Jews, does not imply that the Jewish people are excluded from the *panta ta ethnē*.

Blomberg concludes,

“All nations” translates *panta ta ethnē*. The two main options for interpreting *ethnē* are Gentiles (non-Jews) and peoples (somewhat equivalent to ethnic groups). The former translation is popular among those who see either Jesus or Matthew as believing that God once-for-all rejected the Jews. We have repeatedly seen evidence that calls this perspective into serious question (see under 10:23; 23:39; 24:30; 27:25). Matthew's most recent uses of *ethnē* (24:9, 14; 25:32) seem to include Jews and Gentiles alike as the recipients of evangelism and judgment.

God is not turning his back on Jewish people here. What has changed is that they can no longer be saved simply by trusting in God under the Mosaic covenant. All who wish to be in fellowship with God must now come to him through Jesus.²⁴

Blomberg interprets the words of Jesus accurately as the Messiah had come and fulfilled the promises of the prophets for both Jews and Gentiles. There would be no other name by which men could be saved (Acts 4:12) and no other way to the Father but through the Jewish Messiah. (John 14:6) It is His death and resurrection that provides salvation today and provides the basis for His second coming and right to rule as the once and forever Son of David (Isaiah 9:6-7). Yet, the inclusion of

²⁴ Blomberg, C. (1992). *Matthew* (Vol. 22, pp. 431–432). Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers.

all nations in His plan of redemption does not negate the literal nature of the promises related to the establishment of a literal kingdom in Jerusalem that provides even greater peace and blessing for both Jewish and Gentiles²⁵.

THE ABRAHAMIC COVENANT

In many ways the Great Commission may be viewed as in part, fulfilling the Abrahamic Covenant. In this foundational passage God outlined His plan for His chosen people and marked four major legs upon which the promise stands. By calling Abram to be His "Semite" (see Genesis 9:26, 11:10-32, 12:1-3) and vehicle of promise for a fallen world; God promised the Patriarch that he would be given a people, a land, a relationship with the Creator and a mission – to bless the world. There would be consequences for those nations that did not bless the descendants of Abraham as God would not bless them (Genesis 12:3)²⁶

God chose the Abrahamic family to be His conduit of blessings to a broken world. The Lord always had the nations in mind even when He selected Abram and narrowed His choice. This role for Israel among the nations was reiterated through the Hebrew Scriptures, especially in the Book of Isaiah (Isaiah 41:8-9, 43:10, 44:8). Israel was chosen was to show the nations the glory of the one true God and to capture His inerrant words through Moses, the Psalmists, prophets and ultimately the writers

of the New Testament (who were primarily Jewish). Israel failed in her efforts to bring the light to the nations so God the Father, through His Son, fulfilled the task and now disciples of the Son from among the remnant of Israel and the Gentiles are charged with completing this task by the time Jesus returns and again as Luke writes,

and they will fall by the edge of the sword, and will be led captive into all the nations; and Jerusalem will be trampled under foot by the Gentiles until *the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled*. (Luke 21:24)

In light of the Abrahamic Covenant, it is easy to view the Great Commission as an eschatological commission, a mission with the future in mind, and a sign of the soon coming consummation of the ages. The inclusion of the Gentiles was part of God's plan for all eternity and begins incrementally with the birth of the church, continuing towards full fruition when the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled.

These new disciples from among the "other sheep" (John 10:16) would not replace the Jewish people but rather support the Jewish disciples in their global evangelistic mission. Is it any wonder the Lord called a learned Jewish disciple to be the father of the Gentile mission? And when the task is completed, the Lord will return to reign as the Prince of Peace and eternal Davidic King (Isaiah 9:6-7, Romans 11:11-29), bringing blessing to all.

The Gentiles would have a major role in the events of the consummation of history as God's vehicle in turning the Jewish people back to Himself through His Son. As Paul writes,

I say then, they did not stumble so as to fall, did they? May it never be! But by their transgression salvation has come to the Gentiles, to make them jealous. (Romans 11:11)

²⁵ Romans 11:11-15.

²⁶ Moses uses two Hebrew words for curse. The first, from לָלַךְ, referring to making light of the role the Jewish people would play in God's plan and the second, from כָּרַח, used throughout Dt. 28 and Lev. 26, refers to the temporal curses that would be meted out upon Israel for disobedience. Therefore, if a nation made light of the Jewish people they would receive the curses for disobedience that were promised to fall upon Israel as well.

And this future conversion of the Jewish people would serve as the lynch pin for the second coming and the events of the consummation. The Gentiles therefore have a key role in bringing about the consummation when the Abrahamic blessings will be fully enjoyed. These expected eschatological blessings were not viewed as ethereal and should not be allegorized as this hope for the nations included physical promises of restoration and blessing to Israel and the Gentile nations as well.

THE WORK OF THOSE WHO GO

Jesus gives His disciples three main tasks to accomplish as they go. These cannot be fully understood without knowing more about the first century Jewish history and culture. Matthew had no model for the relationship between a disciple and the Messiah other than that of a Rabbi to his disciples. Knowing more about this relationship helps unlock the meaning of the text by providing us with the historical context to understand Jesus' and Matthew's emphasis on reproducing disciples, baptism and teaching for the purpose of obedience. The focus of the Commission is to make disciples and therefore, it is critical to try and understand what the Savior meant in using the term disciple, μαθητής.

Make Disciples

Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations (πορευθέντες οὖν μαθητεύσατε πάντα τὰ ἔθνη)

There has been quite bit of scholarly and even popular discussion these days about the Jewish roots of the faith. Understanding first century Jewish life is today understood as providing a valuable key to the interpretation of the New

Testament. The role of the first century Jewish Rabbi and his relationship to his disciples provides the context for understanding the "goal" Great Commission; disciples reproducing disciples.

It was not unusual for a Rabbi, like Jesus, to have disciples. The word disciples, "talmidim" is from a Hebrew word which means *to learn*. The disciples were learners. The way a disciple learned from their Rabbi has been described in Jewish literature, though most of what we have written is from the Mishnaic period²⁷ and beyond, but still reflect an earlier understanding of the Rabbi/Disciple relationship. In effect, the disciples of a first century Rabbi were apprentices who lived, ate, travelled, worked and "sat at the feet" of their Rabbi.

In her popular volume, *Sitting at the Feet of Jesus*, Ann Spangler describes the Rabbi/Disciple relationship for today's Christians.²⁸ Members of the Jerusalem School of Synoptic Studies, including Brad Young who teaches at Oral Roberts University have helped us grapple with these Jewish backgrounds as reflected in the early Jesus movement. Additional Jewish background materials can be found in Alfred Edersheim's volumes²⁹ and many additional efforts.

Samuel Byrskog's, in his excellent recent study, *Jesus the Only Teacher*, takes an in depth look at the Jewish backgrounds of what is meant by being a disciple.³⁰ The fact that Jesus,

27 200-500 AD.

28 Spangler Ann, Tverberg Lois *Sitting at the Feet of Rabbi Jesus: How the Jewishness of Jesus Can Transform Your Faith*, Zondervan Publishing House, February 24, 2009.

29 Edersheim, Alfred. *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah*. Vol. all. McLean, VA: MacDonald, 1886 and 1983.

30 Byrskog Samuel, *Jesus the Only Teacher: Didactic Authority & Transmission in Ancient Israel, Ancient Judaism & the Matthean Community* (Coniectanea Biblica New Testament Series) Paperback – August 1, 1994.

the teacher/Rabbi, calls together a group of followers that become his disciples is similar to what other Rabbis and itinerant Jewish teachers did at the time. Byrskog writes,

Jesus is primarily the teacher of his own chosen disciples. To be sure, the didactic storyline (In the Gospel of Matthew) depicts him also as a teacher handing over teaching to other persons: he teaches openly; he enters into discussions and conflicts. But he addresses his teaching mainly to his own disciples. They are his pupils, expected in a special way to carry –first by receiving and understanding – his teaching. In this teacher– pupil relationship, Jesus is as teacher essential identity marker for a group of pupils.³¹

There are three aspects of the Rabbi/Disciple relationship that are critical to our understanding of the great Commission. The first involves the duty of the disciple to speak on behalf of their Rabbi, under his authority. The second is to make other disciples. The Rabbi, at a certain stage in the disciple's growth, goes beyond sending the junior disciple to deliver messages on behalf of the Rabbi and calls upon the junior to gather their own group of younger disciples and to pass along the teachings of their Rabbi.

Finally, the disciple was not only taught to understand what their Rabbis said, but to also obey his teachings based upon the Scriptures. The disciples were to go beyond a mere cognitive understanding of the Rabbi's teachings and to observe and obey what they were taught. It is important to understand that in Jewish thinking, belief and understanding are subordinate to obedience. The moral imperative of Jewish life – behavior over belief, was as common in the first century as it is today. Judaism is a religion of obedience to the Law and not the gathering of religious knowledge.

³¹ Byrskog Samuel, p.234.

Byrskog confirms the above by stating,

Most significant was the duty (of the disciple) to minister to the teacher... It was accordingly a vital importance for a student to attend to the needs of the Rabbi. Certain texts even claim that the rabbis considered those who did not fulfill this duty– no matter what knowledge had been acquired–like uneducated people; they had no part in the world to come; they were liable to death. The pupil was to do for the Rabbi the same services as an ordinary slave, though in order not to be mistaken for a non-Jewish slave he might at certain places be released from some menial tasks such as untying the sandals of the Rabbi.

The duty to minister was not external to the actual studies. On the contrary it was an integral part of learning Torah. The action of the master, though occasionally idiosyncratic and exceptional, was normative teaching. The pupil did not learn only by listening to the words. He was also to observe and be a witness to his teacher's actions... According to Mishna Abot 6:6, the pupils learn the Torah through 48 qualifications, including the ministry to sages.

The integration of these acts into the Torah study itself suggests that the basis of validation residing outside of the life and status of the teacher. Torah, in its various forms, not the Rabbi himself was the focus of attention. The teacher was of interest primarily as the embodiment of Torah in words and deeds... the implicit validation expressed in the active ministry to the teacher was essentially not an acknowledgment of the life and the status of the teacher, but of the teachers ability to transmit Torah.³²

This system, so prevalent in the first century where a Rabbi/Teacher gathers a community of disciples who both serve the Rabbi and learn from the Rabbi is at the very heart of understanding the Great Commission. Jesus

³² Byrskog Samuel, p.89-92. See his use of extensive quotes from Rabbinic sources on these matters.

called His disciples to create new communities of like-minded disciples who would adhere to the interpretations of the Torah they learned from their Rabbi/Teacher – Jesus. The making of disciples was the way in which Jesus would disseminate His teachings to the Jewish people and then, in a most stunning expansion of the model; to spread His teachings among the Gentiles as well.

However, it must be remembered that devotion to the Torah, the Five Books of Moses and more importantly, Jesus’ interpretation of the entirety of the Old Testament Scriptures was to be the focus of the disciples’ task. A disciple’s loyalty to their Rabbi was to be subordinated to their love for the Torah and in particular their Rabbi’s interpretation of Torah. Jesus’ authority rested on His person in a unique manner, as He was the fulfillment of the Torah. This elevated the disciple/Rabbi relationship to a new level. Yet, at heart, Jesus still taught His disciple’s to follow His interpretations of the Torah, wherein lies His true divine authority (Matthew 5: 17-19).

The commission therefore, was a call to create a new community of disciples, from every nation, who would serve the risen Rabbi and have their lives shaped by His teachings.

Stott adds,

For in preaching the Gospel we preach Christ so that men are converted to Him and become His disciples. We can never get away from, or grow out of, this elementary truth that evangelism is preaching Jesus Christ and making disciples of Jesus Christ. The central objective of all Christian evangelism is to secure the allegiance of men and women neither to a church nor to a system of thought or behavior, but to the person of Jesus Christ. Discipleship of Jesus Christ comes first; the church membership, the theology, the ethical conduct follow.³³

³³ Ibid, Stott, German Conference August 2014.

One could debate whether or not a disciple of Jesus should be more loyal to the person of Jesus or to His teachings. However, this is a false dichotomy in this instance, as we are not simply following any human Rabbi, but rather God incarnate and therefore His interpretations of the Word are congruent with His person as would never have been the case with any other Rabbi (John 1:1-3). The first century Jewish Rabbi claimed authority from the Torah, or from another venerated teacher, but Jesus, is the living Torah and needed to make no additional claim of additional authority (Hebrews 1:1-3). In His case, both the teachings and person are united as we follow the Person and His teachings, as they are one and the same.

Jesus disciples– the ones we are to go out and make, must be taught loyalty and devotion to both the written and living Word.

Baptize

Whereas, making disciples is primary, the baptizing of these new disciples is also of critical importance to Jesus. The commission continues by calling upon His disciples to baptize, as Matthew writes,

baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, (βαπτίζοντες αὐτοὺς εἰς τὸ ὄνομα τοῦ πατρὸς καὶ τοῦ υἱοῦ καὶ τοῦ ἁγίου πνεύματος,

The Greek word used by Matthew, *βαπτίζοντες*, is a participle governed by the verb *μαθητεύσατε*, “to make disciples” and therefore is a key aspect to the commission given by Jesus to His Jewish disciples. The disciples would have understood the importance of baptism as it was an every day part of the religious life of first century Jewish life and observed in a variety of contexts for both men and women.

Understanding the importance of baptism within first century Jewish life is also critical in

understanding why Jesus emphasized the ritual. One only needs to visit the Southern steps in Jerusalem to see the multitude of baptismal pools to understand how important Jewish ritual immersion was to the first century Jewish community. Baptism was an inauguration ritual and an external indicator of an internal change demonstrating, in this instance, a cleansing of one's heart and life. Much has been written about the first century Jewish understanding of baptism³⁴ and there is no need to add to the already excellent and available studies on the topic.

The church has also interpreted baptism in many ways; sprinkling, immersion, for babies, adults who profess faith in Jesus the Messiah etc.³⁵ One of the most important elements of baptism is that it was a community event and therefore, the internal change was given expression by both outward observance and public witness.

In his address to the Berlin conference, Stott reminds us that baptism is both personal and corporate, as the disciples are to win and disciple yet also incorporate new believers into the new *Jesus communities* planted.

Further, whatever the precise significance

34 See: Craig S. Keener-The Gospel of John. A Commentary (2 Vols.)-Baker Academic (2010). pp.440-448, Tyndale Bulletin 47.2 (Nov. 1996) 191-214 JESUS AND HIS BAPTISM R. Alastair Campbell http://98.131.162.170//tynbul/library/TynBull_1996_47_2_01_Campbell_JesusBaptism.pdf.

35 See the following: Baptism in the New Testament, by Mr. G.R. Beasley-Murray, Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company; First Edition (March 15, 1973, Believer's Baptism: Sign of the New Covenant in Christ by Dr. Thomas R. Schreiner Ph.D. (Editor), Shawn Wright (Editor) Series: New American Commentary Studies in Bible & Theology (Book 2) B&H Academic; annotated edition (January 1, 2007) The Anglican Evangelical Doctrine of Infant Baptism, a booklet by *John Stott & Alec Motyer*, Latimer Trust, John Stott, The Evangelical Doctrine of Baptism Churchman 112/1 1998 http://archive.churchsociety.org/churchman/documents/Cman_112_1_Stott.pdf, Baptism And Fullness: The Work of the Holy Spirit Today, by John Stott (Author), Michael S. Horton (Foreword), IVP Classics Paperback November 10, 2006.

of baptism may be (and doubtless our particular convictions on this matter are to some extent divergent), we would all agree that baptism is, essentially a public act. People may become disciples of Jesus secretly, but they must be baptized publicly. At the very least, baptism is the public confession and public acknowledgment of those who claim to be Christ's disciples, and thus admits them into the visible church. So in advancing from discipleship to baptism, Jesus moves from the private to the public, from the personal to the corporate, from conversion to church membership.³⁶

Teach

Jesus adds an additional task to the commission by calling upon His disciples to teach the members of these new spiritual communities, as Matthew writes, *teaching them to observe all that I commanded you* (*διδάσκοντες αὐτοὺς τηρεῖν πάντα ὅσα ἐνετειλάμην ὑμῖν*); Stott comments on this third aspect of the disciples' mission – to teach the newly baptized disciples, *διδάσκοντες αὐτοὺς*, all He taught them with the goal to bring about a transformation of their character and behavior.

The purpose of Christ in the Great Commission is not fully met, however, when people are discipled and baptized; they must also be taught. A lifetime of learning and obeying follows conversion, until disciples are conformed to the image of their Lord. Moreover, the substance of the teachings to be given them is all the teaching of Jesus Christ, "all things whatsoever I have commanded you." Notice carefully what we are to teach converts. It is neither what they may want to hear, nor what we may want to say, but what Christ Himself has taught. This is what they are to "keep," that is, to believe and to obey.³⁷

36 Ibid, Stott, German Conference August 2014.

37 Ibid, Stott German Conference August 2014.

Stott points out where we can find the “curriculum” we are to use in discipling and teaching these new believers.

Where, then, is all the teaching of Jesus Christ to be found? The correct answer is not in His discourses in the Gospels,” but “in the whole Bible.” Properly understood, the teaching of Jesus Christ includes the Old Testament (for He set His seal upon its truth and its authority), the Gospels (in which His own words are recorded), and the rest of the New Testament (which contains the teaching of the Apostles through whom, we believe, He continued to speak, in order to complete His self-revelation).³⁸

I concur with Stott’s conclusion to this discussion of the three major tasks of the Great Commission; to make disciples, baptize and to teach – for the sake of observance and obedient. He writes,

Such is the risen Lord’s concept of evangelism--a conception considerably more balanced and comprehensive than much of our modern practice of evangelism. Jesus sent forth His followers not merely to make disciples--discipling was only the first stage of the Great Commission. Two further stages were to follow, namely, baptizing and teaching. The evangelist who would be loyal to his commission, therefore, must have three major concerns: first, conversions to Christ; second, the church membership of converts; and third, their instructions in all the teaching of Christ. While it is legitimate no doubt for sporadic evangelistic missions and crusades to concentrate on their first concern, it would be irresponsible to do so unless adequate provision is made also for admitting converts to church membership and for instructing them.³⁹

Blomberg also agrees with Stott,

The verb “make disciples” also commands a kind of evangelism that does not stop after someone makes a profession of faith. The truly subordinate participles in v. 19 explain what making disciples involve: “baptizing” them and “teaching” them obedience to all of Jesus’ commandments. The first of these will be a once-for-all, decisive initiation into Christian community. The second proves a perennially incomplete, life-long task.⁴⁰

This is a more holistic approach to the Great Commission. Clearly our job begins with the preaching of the Gospel. I would view preaching for conversion or proclamation as implied by the Great Commission though not explicitly stated. There is no reason why Jesus could not have said, “*Go therefore, proclaim the Gospel and convert sinners, 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*”, if that was His intention.

Yet, the Savior chose to state the task in a different way that includes proclamation implicitly. The task of evangelism, however, would remain a part of the Commission and not the whole commission. To equate the Great Commission with what we usually understand as evangelism leading to personal conversion is to misunderstand the Commission. So those who equate the Great Commission as synonymous with proclamation fall short of the Saviors instructions. The casting of the Great Commission by Jesus in Acts 1:8 calls upon the disciples to be His witnesses. Jesus says,

...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.”

38 Ibid, Stott German Conference August 2014.

39 Ibid, Stott German Conference August 2014.

40 Blomberg, C. (1992). Matthew (Vol. 22, p. 431). Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers.

Again, this term would include proclamation and more – even as the term μάρτυς would later become synonymous with self-sacrifice and death.

This does not minimize the good and godly efforts at evangelism⁴¹ of those who have this vision, calling and giftedness. Nor does it lessen the value of those who view their ministry as focused upon helping believers grow in their faith. And those called to planting and nurturing churches – the more corporate aspects of what Stott describes are not doing less for the Savior if they are not quite as active in engaging non-believers in their community because of their responsibilities to the saints.

The Great Commission demands each of the aforementioned ministries, yet believers vary in giftedness and ability. It is the responsibility of disciples to be engaged in the overall Commission though they might focus on a part to which they feel specialty called.

We must follow our calling by better understanding how God has designed and gifted us. Through prayer, Bible study and seeking wise counsel we must discover where we best fit in with this Great Commission. If we tend to focus on one area of the Commission we should not see ourselves as in any way deficient. What we do personally in fulfilling the Great Commission does not change the evident truth of the text – that Jesus has called His early and modern disciples to win the lost to Jesus, to baptize them and help them find their place in the Body of Christ and then to nurture those who come to faith through teaching them the Word of God, so they become obedient disciples.

⁴¹ The following is a good definition of evangelism in the traditional sense; Evangelism is the announcement, proclamation, and/or preaching of the gospel (1 Corinthians 15:1-4), the good news of and about Jesus Christ. Therefore, the gospel is a communicated message-communicated in verbal (Luke 7:22; Romans 10:14-17) and/or written (Luke 1:1-4) form. <http://carm.org/what-is-evangelism>.

Chris Wright adds to our understanding by reminding us that the Great Commission is not the work of the clergy or mission professionals but the responsibility of all Jesus' disciples,

So the discipleship and mission that Jesus calls us into is for the whole of life. If Jesus is Lord of heaven and earth then there is no place, no job, no vocation, no day or night, no part of life at all, that is exempt from the rest of what he says in the Great Commission and all that it refers back to in the rest of the Gospel. Mission is not an agenda, to be tackled by people assigned to 'do it for the rest of us'. Mission is the mode of existence for the whole life of every member of the whole church.⁴²

Finally, the best way to accomplish these Great Commission tasks is by modeling. We cannot help people become what we are not and therefore and so our own growth as disciples and thereby disciple-makers is never over!

THE PROMISE OF HIS PRESENCE TO THOSE WHO GO

Jesus concludes His commission to the *eleven* with a promise to be with them until what is often translated as "*the end of the age*". It is this promise that we want to focus upon as it directly pertains to our topic: The Coming Kingdom and the Great Commission.

Jesus says, *and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.* (καὶ ἰδοὺ ἐγὼ μεθ' ὑμῶν εἰμι πάσας τὰς ἡμέρας ἕως τῆς συντελείας τοῦ αἰῶνος.)

Stott concludes his comments on the text as well by warmly focusing on this promise of the Lord's presence in fulfilling the Great

⁴² <http://www.loimission.net/wp-content/uploads/2014/03/Chris-Wright-IntegralMissionandtheGreatCommission.pdf> page 20 August 2014.

Commission,

“I am with you all the days”—in days of safety and of peril, days of failure and of success, days of freedom to preach and days of restriction and persecution, days of peace and of conflict and war—“I am with you all the days unto the end of the world.” The promise of Christ spans the whole Gospel age. While the Christ who is speaking has only just died and been raised from death, He even now looks ahead to His return in glory. He who has just inaugurated the new age promises to be with His people from its beginning to its end, from its inauguration to its consummation, “even to the close of the age”.⁴³

As a pastor’s pastor, Stott and others who preach and teach on these few words at the conclusion of the Commission, emphasize the comfort the saints will enjoy through the presence of Jesus’ indwelling Spirit in their hearts as they go about fulfilling this *Great Commission*. As His disciples we are grateful that the Spirit of the Lord is with us; giving us power (John 20:21-13, Acts 1:8 etc.), boldness (Acts 4:31) and the confidence of knowing that though invisible, He is our ever present partner in the work of turning the hearts of men and women to Jesus (John 16:5-11).

Charles Simeon also a *pastor’s pastor* emphasizes the enjoyment and comfort God brings through His Spirit to those in process of fulfilling the Great Commission. Simeon writes,

The Lord Jesus Christ will be with his Church and people “even to the end of the world:” and every faithful minister may expect from him all needful direction and support. He will “give testimony to the word of his grace,” and will clothe it with power divine, that it may effect that for which he has sent it. However weak in

itself, it shall in his hands “be quick and powerful, and sharper than a two-edged sword.” It shall be as “a hammer or a fire that breaketh the rock in pieces.” In dependence on him therefore we go forth, expecting assuredly, that, notwithstanding the weakness of those who deliver it, “it shall be the power of God to the salvation of those who hear it. “Were it not for this encouragement, no man, possessed of reason, would presume to undertake the office of a minister: but depending on Christ’s promised aid, we do hope that our labour shall not be in vain in the Lord.”⁴⁴

This is certainly a comfort for all who are serious about fulfilling the Great Commission. Leon Morris, as if true of most modern commentators reflecting on this passage does not further explore the eschatological details implied in the phrase, “end of the age”. He writes what may be understood as a fairly typical view of this promise,

This Gospel opened with the assurance that in the coming of Jesus God was with his people (1:23), and it closes with the promise that the very presence of Jesus Christ will never be lacking to his faithful follower. This does not, of course, mean that Jesus has not been with his people hitherto; he has made it clear that where two or three are met in his name he is there, right in the middle of them (18:20). But when Matthew draws his Gospel to its close, he has nothing in the way of an ascension account. He emphasizes the importance of his continuing presence and concludes his Gospel with the magnificent assurance to the followers of Jesus that that presence will never be withdrawn; he will be with them always, to the end of the world and to the end of time.⁴⁵

44 Simeon, C. (1832–1863). *Horae Homileticae: Matthew* (Vol. 11, pp. 619–620). London: Holdsworth and Ball.

45 Morris, L. (1992). *The Gospel according to Matthew* (pp. 749–750). Grand Rapids, MI; Leicester, England: W.B. Eerdmans; Inter-Varsity Press.

43 Ibid, Stott German Conference August 2014.

However, there is more to tease from this conclusion to the Commission in Matthew 28:20.

THE CONSUMMATION OF THE AGE

Jesus concludes His instructions to the earliest disciples by assuring them of His faithful presence throughout their lives and for the disciples they make as well. In fact He promises that He would *be with* His followers, by His spirit, until the consummation of the ages.

Matthew writes,

and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age. (καὶ ἰδοὺ ἐγὼ μεθ' ὑμῶν εἰμι πάσας τὰς ἡμέρας ἕως τῆς συντελείας τοῦ αἰῶνος.)

Jesus outlines His plans for the *συντελείας* earlier when asked by His disciples, “*Tell us, when will these things happen, and what will be the sign of Your coming, and of the end of the age?*” (Matthew 24:3) The term used for the “*end*” (*even to the end of the age*) as it is often translated in English⁴⁶, is the Greek word *συντελείας*. This word could be translated simply as “the end” meaning; conclusion, fulfillment, the goal achieved etc., emphasizing the Greek term *τέλος*, which is part of the compound term *συντελείας*.

However, *συντελείας* has a different nuance as it adds the prefix *συν*, meaning *together with*, which encourages us to translate *συντελείας* (or *συντελεία*, the nominative form) to mean “consummation”. This understanding of the term helps us would place a greater emphasis on the series of events included as part of the

culmination of the age.⁴⁷ The term refers to a series of events and not simply a conclusion to what has gone before.

Matthew used the term in Matthew 24:3 in reference the series of events linked to the second coming of Jesus outlined in the Olivet discourse.

As He was sitting on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to Him privately, saying, “Tell us, when will these things happen, and what will be the sign of Your **coming**, and of **the end** of the age?” (τῆς σῆς **παρουσίας** καὶ **συντελείας** τοῦ αἰῶνος).

Again the meaning of *συντελείας*, especially in this passage⁴⁸, is best translated by the English phrase, “the consummation of the age.”⁴⁹ In

⁴⁷ In response to the question, is there a difference between Greek words *τέλος* (tel'-os) and *συντελείας* (soon-tel'-i-ah) used at Matthew 24:14 and 28:20 respectively? Can they refer to the same thing? Do they have the same derivation?

If you are asking whether τὸ τέλος and ἡ συντελεία τοῦ αἰῶνος in Matthew 24:14 and 28:20 respectively refer to the same point of time prophetically, the simple answer is yes. τὸ τέλος and ἡ συντελεία τοῦ αἰῶνος are used interchangeably in vv. 3, 6 and 14 in Matthew 24. Since ἡ συντελεία τοῦ αἰῶνος has a uniform meaning throughout the New Testament, we have the equation τὸ τέλος in Matthew 24:14 = ἡ συντελεία τοῦ αἰῶνος in Matthew 28:20. However, τέλος in the NT is not always identical with ἡ συντελεία τοῦ αἰῶνος, even in a prophetic context. Mt. 24:13-14 reads 13ὁ δὲ ὑπομείνας εἰς τέλος οὗτος σωθήσεται. 14καὶ κηρυχθήσεται τοῦτο τὸ εὐαγγέλιον τῆς βασιλείας ἐν ὅλῃ τῇ οἰκουμένῃ εἰς μαρτύριον πᾶσιν τοῖς ἔθνεσιν, καὶ τότε ἔξει τὸ τέλος. The second τέλος is the equivalent of ἡ συντελεία τοῦ αἰῶνος but the first τέλος is not. It rather refers to the end of the earthly life of each believer (cf. John 13:1: Πρὸ δὲ τῆς ἑορτῆς τοῦ πάσχα εἰδὼς ὁ Ἰησοῦς ὅτι ἦλθεν αὐτοῦ ἡ ὥρα ἵνα μεταβῇ ἐκ τοῦ κόσμου τούτου πρὸς τὸν πατέρα, ἀγαπήσας τοὺς ἰδίους τοὺς ἐν τῷ κόσμῳ εἰς τέλος ἠγάπησεν αὐτούς, where τέλος refers to the end of Jesus' earthly life) (<http://www.ibiblio.org/bgreek/forum/viewtopic.php?f=6&t=2635> Re: Greek words rendered at Mt 24:14; 28:20 as “end” at Mt 24:14; 28:20 □ by leonardjayawardena » July 7th, 2014, 12:48 am.

⁴⁸ καὶ ἰδοὺ ἐγὼ μεθ' ὑμῶν εἰμι πάσας τὰς ἡμέρας ἕως τῆς συντελείας τοῦ αἰῶνος.

⁴⁹ *syntéleia*. Outside the Bible this word means ‘common accomplishment’ (also ‘taxes’), ‘cooperation,’ ‘execution,’ ‘completion,’ ‘conclusion.’ In the LXX it has such varied senses as ‘execution,’ ‘totality,’ ‘satiety,’ ‘fulfilment,’ ‘conclusion,’ ‘cessation,’ and ‘destruction.’ In Daniel LXX it is a technical term for the eschatological ‘end’ (cf. 11:35;

⁴⁶ ESV, NASB, “very end”, NIV, “end of the world”, KJV.

other words, Jesus will be with us (by His Spirit) unto the consummation of the ages... when He returns. This is especially true when used with the word *παρουσίας* (*parousia*), translated, "your coming" in Matthew 24:3.⁵⁰ This slightly different English translation portrays the *συντελείας* as an event in itself and not simply as the conclusion of what was previous. The disciples understood this and it is why they ask, "Tell us, when will these things happen, and what will be the sign of Your coming, and of the end (consummation) of the age?"

In response to their question, Jesus details the various signs attached to *consummation of the age*. This is critical as the command to "Go" now takes on a greater urgency emphasizing the *soon coming* events of the end rather than His daily presence with us – as wonderful as this is for the disciples. The comforting presence of the Lord in carrying out of the Commission tends to turn our eyes inwards rather than to what is coming; the *συντελείας*, the consummation of the ages which is at the heart of our motivation for carrying out the commission. It is recognizing what is ahead that compels us to Go!

By using the word consummation, we give greater shape to the expectation of His literal and physical return. This is why Jesus spends two chapters describing the details of the *συντελείας*, Matthew 24-25. The *συντελείας*

should be viewed as an event in itself and not simply a conclusion to what has gone before. It is in knowing what is ahead; in specific detail, that we find the urgency of heart that drives us to fulfill the Great Commission. I am concerned that a neglect of the specifics of God's future plan, especially regarding the return of Jesus, will lull the church to sleep and cause us to believe we have "all the time in the world" to accomplish our task.

These plans for the consummation weighed heavily on the minds of the disciples as well as the Messiah and we must ask ourselves, "why are today's disciples so disinterested in the great prophecies of scripture describing the events of the very last days?"

After all, Jesus and the disciples were very concerned about the coming of the future kingdom. The future Messianic kingdom was woven into the very core of first century Judaism, influenced by the Old Testament itself as well as first century Jewish Messianic expectation; inter-testament literature, the Dead Sea Scrolls and early Rabbinic literature. These expectations surfaced at an almost feverish pitch at the time of Jesus' first coming and yet today, concern for the future has been generally minimized by a rising cynicism within the church that disparages preaching about the second coming and the core themes related to the *συντελείας*.

When our expectation of the *συντελείας* is shaped and informed by Scripture we will be motivated to go out and make disciples. This was the intention of the Savior, which is why He linked the commission to our future hope. As Evangelicals we need to embrace the future God planned for us. Jesus mentions this future many times in the Gospels.

In an article in Jesus.org, popular American preacher and pastor, Church Swindoll writes,

12:4), though it may also mean 'end' in a more general sense (9:26). It is a technical apocalyptic term in the Testaments of the Twelve, sometimes with the thought of completion. The NT uses the term only in eschatological sayings. In Heb. 9:27 Christ's saving work is the event of the end time. The juxtaposition stresses its definitiveness and perfection. In Matthew the phrase 'end of the age' (13:39; 24:3; 28:20) refers to eschatological events that have yet to take place, including the judgment (13:39- 40, 49) *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament: Abridged in One Volume* (Olive Tree software version) –by Gerhard Kittel (Editor), Gerhard Friedrich (Editor), Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Editor) Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company; Abridged edition (July 10, 1985).

50 And "tou ainos" in 28:20.

These facts from biblical prophecy about Christ's return may surprise you:

- One out of every 30 verses in the Bible mentions the subject of Christ's return or the end of time.
- Of the 216 chapters in the New Testament, there are well over 300 references to the return of Christ.
- 23 of the 27 New Testament books mention Christ's return.
- Christ often spoke specifically about His own return to earth.
- Throughout the centuries, Christ's disciples and followers have adamantly believed, written, and taught that Christ would someday return to earth.
- The Bible teaches it. The Lord Jesus stood upon its truths. The apostles declared it and wrote about it. The creeds include it and affirm it.⁵¹

Swindoll is correct in his assessment. The future is a major concern among the authors of Scripture. Therefore, what should we expect? What is coming? What are the events attached to or part of this coming consummation of human history?

The following is a representative summary of the events, divided between those events that are commonly agreed-upon by Christians and others which are debated.

I. Matters Commonly Agreed Upon

- A. Growing tribulation and hardship on earth (1 Thessalonians 5:2-9; Revelation 3:10; 11:18)
- B. The Anti-Christ (2 Thessalonians 2:8ff; Revelation 13:11-15)
- C. The physical return of Jesus (Matthew 19:28; 24:30-31; Luke 12:40)
- D. The lifting of the curse upon earth

(Isaiah 65:17-25; Matthew 19:28; Revelation 21:1ff)

- E. The establishment of the Kingdom (Daniel 2:34-35; 44; Isaiah 9:6-7)
- F. The Resurrection of the dead (John 5:28-29; 1 Corinthians 15:52)
- G. The national repentance of the remnant of Israel (Romans 11:26; Zechariah 12:10 -13:1)
- H. The Great White Throne Judgment (John 5:22; 2 Corinthians 5:10)
- I. The Binding of Satan (Rev 19:20; 20:1-3)
- J. The arrival of the Saints from Heaven with Jesus (Matt 24:31; 1 Thessalonians 4:16)

II. Debated Matters

- A. The Rapture of the church (John 14:1-3; 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18)
- B. The Rebuilding of the Temple (evidence for Temple: Matthew 24:15; Revelation 11:1-12)
- C. The *Millennial* Temple (Zechariah 6:12,13; Is 6:1-5; Ezekiel 43:1-5)
- D. The attack by the nations against Israel (Zechariah 12:1-9; 14:3; Ezekiel 38 – 39)
- E. The return of the Jewish people to the Land of Israel (Ezekiel 34:11-13; 37:1-14; Isaiah 11:11-12)
- F. The re-establishment of the literal Davidic throne in Jerusalem (Jeremiah 23:4-6; Isaiah 11:1-5)
- G. The Gentiles coming to Jerusalem to worship the Messiah and participate in the events of the Jewish calendar (Zechariah 14-12-20; Micah 4:1-4)

Again, one could include additional events or leave out others and even switch the above categories, but the list give us an idea of the critical events usually associated with the second coming or period immediately afterwards. In

⁵¹ <http://www.jesus.org/early-church-history/promise-of-the-second-coming/does-the-bible-teach-that-jesus-will-return.html>.

some Christian circles the above events have been minimized or viewed as having already been fulfilled either literally or in some spiritual sense⁵² and are therefore viewed as speculative.

These events are also deemed less important than how we live our lives and whom we help each day. This has led to a dearth of serious study on the future and diminished preaching on the subject from our pulpits, giving rise to a generation of believers that know very little about the coming consummation and therefore do not think about the second coming and events surrounding the consummation of the ages. This has diminished our sense urgency in the preaching of the Gospel and turned our ministries towards good activities but reduced our attention to more direct Gospel proclamation. This is not as true among those groups that continue to emphasize the soon return of the Lord.

Yet, the future is important to God and it should be important to us as well. The future must shape our present! When we lose a future oriented perspective and neglect to study eschatology with an eye for the details of Jesus' second coming, we lose the urgency attached by Jesus to the Great Commission.

JEWISH EVANGELISM, THE FUTURE AND THE GREAT COMMISSION

One of the most critical areas of study must be the role Israel and the Jewish people play in the events and details attached to the consummation. Ignoring the future Jesus envisions for Israel and the nations, which includes the literal establishment of the Davidic

⁵² Those, like American theologian RC Sproul who take a Preterist view of the Book of Revelation and Olivet Discourse would view many of these events as taking place before 70 AD.

Kingdom, promised in 2 Samuel 7:14ff and 1 Chronicles 17:10-15, Psalm 89 etc., and further developed in the writings of the prophets (Isaiah 42, 44, 49, 60-65, Jeremiah 31-35, Ezekiel 36-39 etc.), short circuits our understanding of what we teach new disciples until He comes about what will happen when He comes. If we minimize the teaching of the Old Testament in our disciple making by spiritualizing the coming kingdom, de-literalizing the Abrahamic and Davidic promises of God to Israel, then the events of the *συντελείας τοῦ αἰῶνος* will be non-specific and unclear.

By minimizing or spiritualizing the details of the consummation, we excise the literal role of the Jewish people from God's plans for the future. Therefore we need to seriously consider the role Jewish people will play in God's plans for the planet.

Has God abandoned His covenant people because of unbelief and disobedience? Or, is there still a particular purpose God has for Jewish people today? Are the Jewish people one *ἔθνη*, among many in the fulfillment of the great Commission, or do the Jewish people still have a biblically defined role in the *συντελείας*.

Paul, a Messianic Jew himself, responds to his own questions in Romans 11:1 by describing the future salvation of the Jewish people and the impact this will have on the rest of the world and argues in Romans chapter 11 more particularly that the salvation of the Jewish people will be the precursor to the second coming of Christ and therefore have a critical role in the fulfillment of God's ultimate purposes for the world.

12 Now if their transgression is riches for the world and their failure is riches for the Gentiles, how much more will their fulfillment be! 15 For if their rejection is the reconciliation of the world, what will their acceptance be but life from the dead?

I can only imagine that this is the event Paul had in mind when he penned Romans 1:16. Knowing the future plan of God, the church should somehow prioritize Jewish evangelism, especially as we see the day of His second coming drawing near. Paul

Bringing the Gospel to the Jewish people *first* should not be viewed as a *priority of privilege*, but as a *priority founded on the Lord's strategy to heal a world broken by sin*. God chose the Jewish people for a special role and one day this will become evident as the end time remnant of Jewish people repent and the Lord returns (Zech. 12:10, Isaiah 9:6-7, Acts 3:19 ff.).

This gives us insight into Paul's statement earlier in Romans 11:11.

I say then, they did not stumble so as to fall, did they? May it never be! But by their transgression salvation has come to the Gentiles, to make them jealous.

As mentioned earlier, according to Paul's statement in Romans 11:11, the Gentiles are to called make the Jewish people jealous of Jesus within them. The Lord chose the Jewish people to reach the Gentiles, but the Jewish people failed, so He sent His Son, the greatest Jewish person who ever lived, to complete the task. And now He calls upon Gentiles who believed the Gospel through a remnant of Jewish people to bring the message back to the original messengers!

How will the church fulfill this mandate to prioritize Jewish evangelism and make Jewish people jealous? What practical steps can be taken to give the church around the world a passion for reaching Jewish people with the message of the Jewish Messiah? The turning of the Jewish people to Jesus is one of the great and final events included as part of the *συντελείας*.

CONCLUSION: OUR FUTURE HOPE AND THE GREAT COMMISSION

We have less time left to fulfill the Lord's command to make disciples among the nations than we think. And it is this very sense of urgency that will motivate us to complete the task. Yet, we are in great danger of losing this urgency if we continue to minimize or spiritualize God's future plan. In essence, this future hope is as much a part of the great Commission as the command to make disciples and is mentioned by Jesus to provide both comfort and motivation. The Lord is encouraging His disciples to fulfill the Commission with dispatch and urgency as the planned events for the *συντελείας* are unyielding, inevitable and unstoppable and will soon be upon us.

If we do not have the end in mind then we will not do the work He has called us to do with dispatch or urgent enthusiasm. Human need can only motivate global evangelism to a certain extent as there are billions needing Jesus who will never hear because their material needs are not apparent. We have become more concerned with the present than the future. We feed the body and attempt to free captives from various forms of social slavery, but these expressions of love and grace alone will not save a person. It is the burning the hope of heaven and fear of hell rooted in the soul of the disciple and part of Jesus' teaching about the "consummation" and the end of the age that will move the Church to complete her task.

To balance the above, we also understood that our ministry to those suffering in this present world, motivated by the love and compassion of the Messiah resident in our hearts is also of great importance. Historically Christians have had great difficulties combining our love for people and belief in the "harder

truths” of eternal judgment in determining our strategies to fulfill the Great Commission. We need to take both sides of this eternal equation into heartfelt consideration.

Clearly, the mood in the church has shifted over the last 50 years. Today’s disciples are generally uncomfortable discussing biblical prophecy, heaven and hell, and trend towards accepting some type of *eschatological agnosticism*. If asked, most believers will tell you they do believe in the physical return of the Lord and the establishment of the kingdom, but if you ask any thing further you might be told that it is enough to know the future is coming and we should not debate the specifics. It seems that any discussion about the literal second coming of Jesus that goes beyond acknowledging that the event will take place is viewed with skepticism and those interested in the topic are viewed as having an obsession to discover unknowable future events.

A concern for studying, peaching or discussing the details of events surrounding the second coming of Jesus is often deemed inappropriate and unhealthy as it takes the eyes of Evangelicals off of a suffering humanity and the problems of today. There is an underlying attitude that suggests we should be more concerned about today rather than tomorrow – which is *unknowable*. Because of this perspective many Bible teachers write and speak about the end times in the murkiest of terms, as end times events are considered difficult to interpret, divisive and at times, fanciful.

Admittedly, the Church might be over compensating for what has been an overzealousness and imbalance in 20th century prophetic Bible teaching and more specifically, during the last half of the 20th century, with the formation of the modern state of Israel. *Yet,*

we should not throw out the baby with the oversensationalized prophetic bath water! It is time to recalibrate our reading of Scripture and return to a deep concern and even a longing for the *συντελείας* mentioned in our text and the events surrounding the second coming of Christ. We cannot dismiss gaining a biblical understanding of the future because of the errors of the past. We must be concerned about the *συντελείας* as the future is part of what Jesus told His disciples to teach to their new disciples. The *πάντα ὅσα ἐνετελέαμην ὑμῖν* includes His teachings about His coming and the need to prepare for this eventuality.

By studying the details of the consummation we will help our disciples develop a greater sense of urgency for the Gospel. They will be less cynical and understand that though the *signs of the times* at times, may have been misread by overly zealous believers, they are still a critical part of full counsel of God for which we will be held accountable to teach our disciples.

We should be motivated in our proclamation by love for both God and man, yet we should also have a rightful fear on behalf of those who do not believe as the *συντελείας* brings with it both great blessings to those who believe and judgment to those who do not. It is this immanence of the future that drives us to preach the Gospel with greater urgency.

What are we to do with our time until this *συντελείας* arrives? Jesus has called us to persuade a sinful and broken world that they not only need to believe, but to learn, follow and observe (obey) what He said. May the Lord helps us fulfill the task!

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