

The Great Commission in the Book of Acts

by Keith Malcomson

The Great Commission is a divine command given by Jesus Christ to His Church to spread the gospel to all nations, making disciples of all people, and it is fulfilled through the power and guidance of the Holy Spirit.

Scripture: Luke 14:27, Luke 24:46, Acts 1:8, Acts 4:13, Acts 8:4

Topics: "Great Commission", "Holy Spirit"

Description

Keith Malcomson emphasizes that The Book of Acts is the authoritative account of the early Church history, revealing the Acts of Jesus Christ through the Church by the Holy Spirit. The Great Commission is a dominant theme throughout Acts, starting from the resurrection of Christ to His ascension, where He commissions His disciples to spread the gospel. The commission was not limited to the 12 apostles but extended to all believers, emphasizing the continuous and universal nature of the mission. The early Church in Acts exemplified the fulfillment of the Great Commission through the power and guidance of the Holy Spirit, without the need for human strategies or programs.

Transcript

The Book of Acts is the only authoritative and inspired account of the early beginnings of Church history. If we were to give an accurate title to this account we would call it, The Acts of Jesus Christ by the Holy Spirit through the Church. One of the underlying and dominating themes of the Acts is the Great Commission.

As we come to the end of the four Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John and pass through the dark hours of Calvary we come to the victorious resurrection, ascension, glorification and perfection of Christ after which He walks amongst His disciples for a 40 day period.

Each Gospel finishes with a commission from the risen Christ. It was first given on the day of His resurrection and the last time 40 days later on the day of his ascension to heaven.

First at Jerusalem on the day of His resurrection to the 10 who were gathered with many others (Lk.24:46-48; Jn.20:21), then eight days later to the 11 when Thomas was with them (Mk.16; Jn.20), then again to the 11 on a Mount in Galilee (Mt.28:18-20) this was most likely when above five hundred brethren saw Him (I Cor.15:6), and lastly on the Mount of Olives at the time of His ascension (Acts 1:12).

This contradicts the old man-made teaching that the commission was only given to and for the 12 apostles to fulfil during their lifetime. It also contradicts the new man-made teaching that it was only given to the 12 apostles and only to gifted apostles in all succeeding generations. In fact the whole history of the Book of Acts breaks up such theories of men.

In the Gospel of Luke over a period of 33 years we see Christ set towards embracing the Cross in a progressive move towards Jerusalem. From the beginning of Acts we see Christ in His Church progressively moving away from Jerusalem in every direction over a period of 33 years in order to reach the uttermost parts of the earth.

The four-fold commission in the Gospels is complemented by Luke's portrayal in Acts 1:8: "But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth."

This brief verse is the key to the whole book. It gives us a breakdown of contents. It states in brief what is to follow in the rest of the book. It states in a moment what is related over the following 33 years. Here we find the theme underlying the whole text that Luke writes.

Luke breaks down the whole book in the following manner: Chapters 1-7 relates the spread of the gospel in the city of Jerusalem; Chapters 8-12 relates the spread of the gospel in Judea and Samaria; and Chapters 13-28 relates the spread of the gospel to the uttermost parts of the earth.

THE BREADTH OF THE GREAT COMMISSION

Over the years I have heard thousands of different ministries relay visions, goals, strategies and plans which have little or nothing to do with this commission. This was the only commission, vision and last command of the risen Christ. This is the only vision and commission for every preacher, leader, believer and local church. We could say that these words were the marching orders for the early Church. Those marching orders have never been changed, revoked or improved on. Neither has the direction. The command is still 'Onwards and outwards.'

Every Church in the Book of Acts from the large one at Jerusalem in Judea to the small one in Philippi in Macedonia was caught up in this commission. Every local church is called to hold this commission as their personal commission. To disobey this is to disobey Christ. This commission is a divine command revealing the eternal purpose of God. This is not a human invention or programme but a God-given mandate which cannot be superseded or updated. Every single Church in Acts no matter the size, city, country or culture marched to this drumbeat.

Sadly the task carried by every member of the early church as seen in Acts has now been handed over to mission societies and special ministries. Most mission societies are doing the work of the local church instead of recalling each local church back to its God-ordained commission of being Christ's tool and instrument in fulfilling the Great Commission. The great commission has become the fad of a few instead of the compulsory task of all. This is Christ's call to every preacher, every believer and every church.

The great commission is not just for apostles and evangelist's but for prophets, teachers and pastors as well. Every ministry, every preacher and every gifting is caught up in this commission. The great commission is not just the work of reaching souls with the gospel or seeing them converted to it. It is the full work of discipleship from first receiving the gospel through to being fully established in Christ and

effectually functioning in Christ's Church.

The great commission is not restricted to making converts, though that is the initial part of it. Christ said "teach all nations." That means disciple all nations. Make disciples not just converts. The great commission emphasizes taking new converts and making them disciples of Jesus Christ. A disciple is a disciple of the cross: "And whosoever doth not bear his cross, and come after me, cannot be my disciple" (Lk.14:27). True converts have been taught the way of the cross and are living it. Where you see no cross and no death to self you can be sure they are not true converts.

When we come to ch.8 of Acts we see that when terrible persecution broke out in Jerusalem the Apostles stayed but: "...they that were scattered abroad went every where preaching the word. Then Philip went down to the city of Samaria, and preached Christ unto them." These were the rank and file members of the Church moving, not just under terrible circumstances, but under the impulse of the great commission. These disciples added to their numbers through their personal witness. The apostles stayed; the church went. Every believer was a worker, warrior and witness. Wherever individual believers travelled, worked and settled new churches sprang up naturally. They succeeded where we have failed. The Church of our day either relegates its responsibility to gifted leaders, a Mission Society or to young short-term missionaries.

This is the task of all not a few. The simple uncomplicated instrument which God has chosen to fulfil this commission is the Church. It was given a world-wide commission and vision from its very beginning. Every member of every church carried this commission in their heart. God's purpose has not changed.

We see this commission fulfilled by Paul first of all as a preacher in Tarsus, then as a teacher of the Word at Antioch and last of all as an Apostle sent to the Gentiles. In all three roles his life was caught up with a vision of fulfilling the great commission.

If we look for a moment at the ministry of Paul in Acts we see that in just one period of ten years he established churches in four different Gentile provinces:- Galatia, Macedonia, Achaia, and Asia. Before this time there were no churches in these areas; but after one decade Paul could feel that his apostolic commission and work had been fulfilled in these areas. He left a trail of churches, elders, young preachers and true disciples behind him. And so he set his eyes to the western region of the empire and the city of Rome then the country of Spain.

The apostles of Christ knew that to plant a Bible based, Christ-centred, Spirit-filled Church, walking in holiness and preaching the gospel was true success. If they could plant such a church in a community then they knew that these true disciples would continue to labour and march forward according to the same commission. This commission is a fire that burns and spreads when truly lived out.

THE SECRET OF THE GREAT COMMISSION

The Acts is The Acts of Jesus Christ through the Church by the Holy Spirit. To know the history of this early church from AD 30-63 is to be given a vision, example and pattern for today. That Church was Spirit-birthed, Spirit-filled and Spirit-guided. The Church was indwelt, empowered and led by the Holy Spirit. This was their secret.

The Holy Spirit dominates the record of the Acts as He works in power to perform the words of Christ and to glorify Him in and through the Church. Someone once said: "Christ went up, the Holy Spirit came down,

and the disciples went out." How true. Act 1:8 "But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me..."

This enduement of power was ordained of God for the purpose of empowering weak vessels to become witnesses of Christ in the entire world. The only strategy, method and tactic of the Early Church was the power, guidance, direction and control of the Holy Spirit. True evangelism is working in cooperation with the Holy Spirit to complete the body of Christ. We must return to this simple method again.

He brings a mighty witness to the risen Christ out of the terrible weakness of the disciples. The gospel spreads and the churches grow spiritually in displaying Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit alone. They had no need of gimmicks and games. They were not ashamed of the gospel and did not lessen its demands. Everything was by the Spirit.

The coming and ministry of the Holy Spirit did not and does not replace the focus upon Christ. He, the Holy Spirit, is given the task of bringing the Redemption of Christ personally to lost souls and then making those individuals witnesses to the resurrection. Christ is the head of the Church but the Holy Spirit is the life of the Church. His whole ministry is to bring us to conformity to Jesus Christ. The one theme and message of the Holy Spirit is Christ. Christ is the focus and object of every revelation of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit never usurps the place of Christ as supreme in the Church, but represents Him perfectly in the Church. All the workings of the Holy Spirit are in perfect line with the great commission given by Jesus Christ.

Some of the biggest churches in Acts were poor, others were small and many were persecuted. Some of the greatest preachers of that first 33 years were mocked as being illiterate ignoramuses (4:13). There was little organisation apart from Christ as their Head and the Holy Spirit as their guide; organisation was simple and complete. Imposing the rule of man instead of the leadership of the Holy Spirit is where every problem begins. Christ is still working from heaven by His Holy Spirit, in and through His Church in fulfilling this great commission. May God again bring us back to this simple Biblical pattern.

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