

# The Great Commission

by Peter Maiden

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*The Great Commission is a call to Christian mission, motivated by the character of God, the commands of Jesus Christ, the coming of Christ, the call of God, and the condition of lost men and women.*

**Duration:** 37:11

**Scripture:** Matthew 28:16, Matthew 28:18-19

**Topics:** "Great Commission"

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## Description

In this sermon, the speaker, Amy Carmichael, highlights the urgent need for more people to proclaim the way of salvation to a world blindly moving towards destruction. She emphasizes that the character of God, the commands of Christ, the coming of Christ, the love of God, and the condition of the lost should motivate believers to engage in evangelism. The speaker also discusses the mythology of Christian mission, referencing Luke's Gospel and John's account of Jesus sending his disciples into the world to pour out their lives for others. She encourages listeners to study recent mission history and witness what God has done in the world, using the example of Afghanistan as a land with a small number of Christians but with the potential for transformation.

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## Transcript

Matthew chapter 28, we're going to read the account of the Great Commission from verse 16 to verse 20. Matthew 28 verse 16. The eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had told them to go.

When they saw him, they worshipped him, but some doubted. Then Jesus came to them and said, All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commended you.

And surely I will be with you always, to the very end of the age. Tonight to open our conference, I want to try and do three things. First of all, I want us to look at the motivation for Christian mission.

Why should international Christian mission be so high on the priority list of Christians today? Secondly, I want us to look at the situation in Christian mission. Just how are we getting on in fulfilling the Great Commission which Jesus Christ gave to us? I suppose there's one way we can find out what really is on the heart of the Lord Jesus Christ. And that is to look at what he spoke about particularly just before he

ascended to the Father's right hand.

If you look into the Gospels, the Gospel writers leave you in absolutely no doubt. Matthew's account we have just looked at together. Go and make disciples of all nations.

John Mark puts it only slightly differently. Go and preach the Gospel to every nation. Dr. Luke puts it like this, right towards the end of his Gospel.

Repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in Christ's name to all nations beginning at Jerusalem. The Apostle John probably puts it in the most challenging way of all the Gospel writers. Meeting the disciples after his resurrection, the Lord Jesus says, As the Father has sent me, even so send I you.

Every time I speak those words or read those words, they challenge my heart. The Lord Jesus says, As the Father sent me into the world. How did the Father send the Son into the world? He sent his Son to pour out his life for the world.

As the Father sent me, says Jesus, I am sending you. The Christian Church, the body of Christ, is called to pour out its life for the world. When Dr. Luke begins his second book, the Acts of the Apostles, he starts it in exactly the same way.

You remember how the Lord Jesus gathers the disciples around him on the Mount of Ascension, and he commissions them to go starting at Jerusalem, and then Judea, after being anointed and filled by the Holy Spirit. Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and to the uttermost parts of the earth. So there's absolutely no doubt, if the Lord Jesus Christ was standing here tonight, one of the subjects, not the only subject, but one of the subjects he would want to talk about is his great desire to see the world reached with the message of salvation.

So five reasons why that should be a priority for us today. Very briefly, number one, the character of God. That's where all Christian motivation begins.

The motivation to live a holy life begins with the holiness of God. The motivation to reach the world with the message of salvation begins with the character of God. Once a Christian begins to understand the God he is worshipping, he is thereby motivated, or should be, to reach the world with the gospel.

Think of God the Father. God is spirit. He is a mobile deity.

He's not a stone deity, or a wooden deity. He's not the kind of God who can only be worshipped on one particular mountain, as the woman in John 4 was convinced was the case. Our God is spirit.

He's a moving, mobile God. Our God is light. Light is a diffusive element.

It spreads itself out over all of space. And the very nature of light is to banish darkness. Our God is love.

And it was the love of God which motivated him 2,000 years ago to give his only begotten son for the life of the world. You cannot look at God the Father without being motivated to Christian mission. You cannot look at God the Son without being motivated in a similar fashion.

I was reading through one of the gospels quite a few months ago now, and I was impressed by how often the word immediately, or straightaway, is used in connection with the life of the Lord Jesus. Here, if ever

there was a man of mission, was such a man. Moving immediately from this situation of need to the next.

And then straightaway here, remember how he said to his disciples in John 9, I must work the works of him who sent me while it is day. The night is coming when no man can work. Those are the words of a man of mission.

And then look at God the Holy Spirit. The Lord Jesus told us just before he left to ascend to the Father that when the Spirit came, he would convince the world. The Holy Spirit has a world mission.

He would convince the world of sin, of righteousness, and of judgment to come. A few years ago now, quite a few years ago, A. W. Tozer described worship as the lost jewel of the Christian church. If he was alive today and still writing, I don't think he would write the same words.

Because over the last 20, maybe 25 years, I think the body of Christ increasingly has been recapturing a sense of the importance and the place of Christian worship. And it's great to see churches, Christian unions, fellowships being renewed in Christian worship. It's wonderful.

But sometimes I wonder, just how genuine is the worship? Because you know if you are a genuine worshipper of God, you must be a missionary. Can I repeat that? If you are a genuine worshipper of God, you must be a missionary. Because you cannot look at God, Father, Son, or Spirit, without being motivated to mission.

So that's the basic motivation, the character of God. And then secondly, we have the clear commands of Jesus Christ. If you can't be a genuine worshipper without being a missionary, then equally you can't be an obedient Christian without being a missionary.

If you're a Christian tonight and you're not a missionary, you're disobedient. You're living in open disobedience. Because it was the Lord Jesus who said, you are to go.

He didn't say wait until you're fully qualified and then go to some foreign land. He said, I want you, where you are right now, to be going into your world and preaching the gospel. So, the character of God and the commands of the Lord Jesus motivate us to mission.

Thirdly, the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. I'd like you to take time. There's going to be a lot of spare time this week, as you can see from your program.

I'd like you to take time sometime this week to read through the third chapter of 2 Peter. Because I think it's such a vital chapter when we're thinking of mission. Here Peter describes the end of the age and what solemn words there are contained within that chapter.

And then he shows us what the response of the Christian should be to the doctrine of the second coming of Christ. How do you respond to this fact that one day Jesus Christ is going to return to this world? How do you respond to it? Do you get your slide rule out and try and determine exactly when it's going to be? What's going to come before it? And what's going to follow it? Is that how you respond? That's not what the New Testament calls for. Every time you come across the doctrine of the second coming of Christ in the Bible, every time, it calls for an ethical, practical response.

So Peter, after describing the end times, says first, since all of it is thus to be dissolved, since it all to come to pass, what sort of persons ought you to be in lives of holiness and godliness? Then he adds these

words, speeding forward the day of God. Hastening forward the day of God. Now here's a paradox.

We know that the day when Jesus Christ will return to this earth is a fixed day. It's a tremendous encouragement to me to imagine that in heaven there's a calendar. And somewhere on that calendar the day is marked.

I'm sure there's a red star beside it. The day of God. The day when Jesus will come and will see the travail of his soul and will be satisfied.

It's a fixed day. Jesus told us that. He said the Father knows the day.

But here there's a paradox. There's a sense, says Peter, in which you can speed forward that day. In which you can hasten its coming.

Of course, the answer to the little riddle is that God has not only fixed the day, but he's fixed the means by which that day will be brought to pass. One of those means, just one, but one important means by which the day of God will be brought to fruition is by you and I and all God's people spreading out throughout the world with the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. Because Jesus clearly taught that before that day comes the gospel must be preached to all nations.

There will be people from every tribe, from every tongue and from every nation gathered with us around the throne of our Lord Jesus Christ in heaven. So the coming of Christ should motivate you and I to mission. Fourthly, the call of God should be a tremendous motivation.

It's a thrilling thing, isn't it? God has not chosen angels to bring his purposes to pass in this world. He has not chosen to do it all himself. Of course, he could have done that.

There's one sense in which God doesn't need you and I. He only needs us because he's chosen to need us. He's chosen to give us this enormous privilege preaching his Son, preaching the gospel, a message so precious to his own heart. He's chosen to give that privilege to me and to you.

And there's no higher calling on the face of this earth than the calling of the Christian to share his life and his truth with his fellow men. And finally, the condition of lost men and women motivates me to mission. I was brought up in a Christian home.

My father was a preacher. My brother was a preacher. Some people said I didn't really have an opportunity in life.

I was destined to become a preacher as well. Taken along to Sunday school from the age of two, something I've never quite forgiven my mother for, I learned the gospel very, very early in life. And by about the age of 14, ridiculous really thinking back, I was going around the chapels and churches of Cumbria, where I come from.

You've probably never heard of it. It's not in outer Mongolia. It's actually just a little further north.

But I was going around the churches and chapels of Cumbria preaching. Now, I became a Christian probably very, very early in my life. I can remember very, very vividly.

This is important for any mother here. I can remember very, very vividly, right back to the age of three and four, sitting with my mother every night. My father was off in a way preaching.

But my mother was always there. And every night, a Bible reading. Every night, family prayers.

And very, very early in my life, I came to love Jesus Christ. I can't remember a day when I haven't loved Him. I can remember many, many days when I haven't loved Him, as I should.

But I can't remember a day when I didn't love Jesus. Now, there's many advantages to an upbringing like that. I wouldn't swap it for anything.

But there are some disadvantages. And one disadvantage, which I personally feel, is that I just don't understand what it must be to be lost in this world. What does it feel like? What is it? To be without God and without hope.

I've never felt it. It's never been my experience. And so a passage of Scripture I often meditate upon.

I don't think that's too strong a phrase. Meditate upon is Ephesians 2, verses 1 to 3. It's here that Paul describes what it is to be lost in this world, whether it's in Chester or China. What it is to be lost in this world.

Paul says it's two things. The lost person is dead in trespasses and sins. Could he have chosen a more definite, illustrative term than that? The man without Christ is dead.

How helpless and hopeless the unregenerate are. They are unable to do anything for themselves. Dead in trespasses and sins, Paul goes on to say at the end of verse 3 that they are by nature objects of God's wrath.

What a phrase of Christian theology that is. By nature objects of God's wrath. They don't become under the wrath of God because of the practice of their lives.

They are by nature the objects of God's wrath. They are born in sin. They are shapen in iniquity.

And the original sin becomes actual sin. They are the objects of the wrath of God. The person you are working beside, the person you are living next door to, is dead in trespasses and sins.

Living under the wrath of a God who has a holy hatred of sin. Amy Carmichael, marvellous female missionary to southern India, once had this picture in her mind. Many of you will have heard of it.

It was the picture of a vast plain. And at the edge of the plain there was a deep chasm. And she was sitting making daisy chains with her fellow Christians.

And walking across the plain were thousands and thousands of people. And she thought to begin with they were just tourists coming to look at the depth of the chasm possibly. Then she with her fellow Christians saw one fall to destruction.

Followed swiftly by a second and a third and they were going over in their hundreds. Looking more closely she saw that every one of them was blind. And then I'll add a little bit to the story.

Looking a bit more closely she saw one or two people running along the edge. There were great gaps between these people. There just weren't enough of them.

They were running along the edge and they were crying this is the way. Walk in it. But there weren't enough of them.

And those who were involved many of them were obviously so involved that their health was breaking. And Amy Carmichael said that's the world situation today. And brothers and sisters it is.

A world blindly moving to destruction. And there just aren't enough people running along the edge and saying this is the way. Walk ye in it.

So here's the motivation for our conference this week. Here's that which should motivate each one of us to be missionaries. The character of God, the commands of Christ, the coming of Christ, the call of God upon our lives and the condition of the lost motivate us to evangelism.

Think of it like this. You cannot look up the character of God without being motivated to evangelism. You cannot look in to the word of God, the commands of Christ, without being motivated to evangelism.

You can't look forward to the coming of Christ without being motivated to mission. You can't look back to the call of God upon your life without being motivated to mission. You can't look around you to the people you're rubbing shoulders with without being motivated to mission.

Brothers and sisters, it's a fact. You can't look anywhere as a Christian without being motivated to Christian mission. There's the motivation.

Very, very quickly, let's look at the situation. With this motivation for 2,000 years, how have we got on? It'd be interesting to have a geography lesson to begin our conference. I wonder how many people there are living in the world today.

I often ask the question, get some amazing answers. Well, in 1976, the last real records I have at my disposal, there were 4 billion, 19 million people living on the face of the earth. There'll be many more than that now.

But let's take that 4 billion as a general number. How many of these are Christians? 1 billion of the 4 billion would claim to be Christians. Now that includes every possible facet of the visible Christian church.

It would include Greek Orthodox, Russian Orthodox, all the Roman Catholic Church, all the Protestant churches, even all the pseudo-Christian cults as well. 1 billion people claim to be Christians. I don't know how many of those are truly born again.

I'm sorry I said 1 million. I should have said 1 billion claim to be Christians. How many are true Christians? I don't think anyone can compute.

Another billion live in the same areas, general areas, as those Christians live. So it would be quite natural, if the church was a witnessing church, for another billion of the 4 million to easily hear the gospel of Christ. 1 billion claim to be Christians.

Another billion live fairly close to Christian. But that leaves 2 billion people. Half the world's population who are not going to hear the gospel of Christ.

Now listen to this. They're not going to hear the gospel of Christ unless a Christian leaves his own culture, leaves his own nation, probably leaves his own language, and goes, as we say, cross-cultural. Goes into another culture, to another nation, learns another language to share the gospel of Christ with his fellow men.

I think we can still honestly say that probably half the world's population has never been given a clear presentation of the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. Well I was going to say much more about the situation, but time has gone, and I do want to just touch on this third point. Having looked at the motivation, having had a very brief look at the situation, let's look at the mythology of Christian mission.

And if I talk about this and I'm a little tense, I'm sure you'll understand, because I am a bit tense, a bit upset about the British church when it comes to mission. Because I hear these 3 myths being propagated constantly. The first myth is that the job can never be done.

I've actually had Christians shrug their shoulders in front of me and said, we're never going to reach the world with the gospel. Some have argued their way out of it, I don't know whether you've heard this particular doctrine, and they say the Great Commission isn't for us. Matthew 28, 16 to 20, it's not for us.

I've never been told who it's for, but it's not for us. I can give you a tape from a preacher trying to make that point. We're no longer under the Great Commission.

We'll just be feeling under legalistic bondage if we feel we have to take the message to the whole world. It's impossible. The population's exploding at such an astronomical rate, there's no possibility of the job of world mission ever being done.

What would I say to such people? Well, if I could keep sane and quiet and calm and cool, I would say three things. Number one, I would say think of recent history. Two hundred years ago, Protestants were confined to Northern Europe, the Atlantic seaboard of North America, and there were a few outposts in the Caribbean, South Africa, the Dutch East Indies, which is now parts of Indonesia, and India.

Every Protestant in the world lived in that small section of the world. Today, two hundred years later, there are more Evangelical Christians living outside of these lands than within them. The growth of the body of Christ in Africa, South of the Sahara, Latin America, and parts of Asia continues at a far higher rate than the population growth in many of those countries.

Take Africa. Africa is rapidly becoming, nominally, a Christian continent. Already more than half of black Africa claims to be Christian.

We really should stop, if we have time, and just praise God for all he has done, and particularly, over the last two hundred years. It's a drama which I trust you'll get up to date upon. Get the books of recent mission history.

You'll find many of them on the book table. And you will gasp at what God has done the last two hundred years. The second thing I would say to such people is think of the present.

Open your eyes and see what God is doing in the world today. And then tell me, the world will never be reached. I've only got time to give you one example.

I don't know how much you know of the land of Afghanistan. I hope you'll know a lot more before the end of this week. It's a land of about nineteen million people.

It's a land which I've been praying for, personally, for about ten years. Before the Russian army moved in, there were only a handful of Christians in that country. Maybe thirty, forty.

Very, very, very few. And I can remember being very angry the day I heard of the Russian army moving into Afghanistan. I was very angry with God.

Angry that he should allow a country already ruled by Islam now to have this atheistic government ruling it as well. But I just didn't understand what God was doing. Now we can look back and see two things.

See about one and a half million, maybe two million refugees living in the freedom of Pakistan. Now I can't explain all the suffering, all the bloodshed, but I can tell you that almost two million people are now in a position where they can be reached with the gospel of Christ in comparative freedom. A friend of mine was telling me that this is the greatest day to reach Afghan people with the gospel for eleven hundred years.

And he said it's by courtesy of the Russian army. And within Afghanistan extraordinary things are taking place. Arthur Pont, the General Secretary of the Bible and Medical Missionary Fellowship was with us in Bromley at a prayer meeting recently and he was speaking of the growth of the church in Afghanistan.

The church, which may have been fifty before the Russians moved in, has grown tenfold. It's at least five hundred now, probably many more. And how have these people come to Christ? Listen to this, it'll probably blow your mind so take a deep breath.

Many of these Afghan people have come to Christ on the streets of their towns and villages through the witness of Russian Christian soldiers, conscripted into the army. They have been through their life and through their lips where possible, witnesses to the beauty of Jesus Christ. And Islamic Afghan people have been drawn to Jesus Christ, the Son of God, through the witness of Russian soldiers.

I don't know whether you've got an imagination like me but I can imagine committee meetings in hell, demons getting together and saying we've really blown it. Where's the strategy gone wrong? You know that's happening all over the world. A sovereign God overruling every day the deeds of men to bring glory to the name of Jesus Christ.

If I had time I could tell you of Nepal, the land I've recently been to, where it's illegal to become a Christian. How does the Holy Spirit contend with that? It's illegal to become a Christian but the church is growing. Nothing in 1953, probably 13, 14, maybe even 16,000 Nepali believers today in the only Hindu kingdom on earth where it's illegal to become a Christian.

My, I could keep you here a long time just encouraging you to think of the present. A sovereign God at work fulfilling His promises and then I would say think of the future. Why? Because the promise of God is I will build my church.

The promise of God is most people from every tribe, every tongue and every nation will be there and I just know that you believe the promises of God. That's the first myth. Wipe it from your mind, the myth that the job is beyond us.

The second myth is the total opposite and I hear this even more prominently in Britain today. The myth that the job is already done. I was at a major Christian conference here in Britain a year or two ago now and the leading speaker at this conference began his message with the following words.

I wrote them down. We all now know that Britain is one of the most un-evangelized nations on the face of the earth today and there were many amens when that sentence was spoken and Britain is a desperately needy nation. 5% of our population attend church regularly.

In the inner city it's probably as low as 1%. But please, please get it out of your mind that Britain is the most un-evangelized nation in the world today. That is just such an imbalanced view.

It's almost impossible for me to believe that people believe it. In the world today there are 5,103 known spoken languages. 770 of these languages have the New Testament complete.

Another 340 do not need the Bible in their own tongue. That's either because they're bilingual or because their language is now almost extinct. In 940 other languages Bible translation has begun.

That leaves over 3,000 languages being spoken and read on the face of the earth today where they haven't got one page of Holy Scripture. There are lands still in the world today with no known believers whatsoever. Others with literally just a handful maybe 5 or 10.

Maybe this week we should be praying for Colonel Gaddafi's Libya. The Maldiv Islands. Mauritania.

Saudi Arabia. Mongolia. The Muslim Malay population of Malaysia.

The Comoros. Afghanistan. I've already mentioned Turkey with its 46 million people and probably less than 100 Christian Muslim Turks in that Christian Turks, sorry in that Muslim nation.

Recently there's been a lot of work on the subject of unreached peoples amongst missionary strategists today. And we're confidently told that there are at least 15,000 people groups. That's groups with a separate identity.

Might be a language might be a cultural identity or something like that. There are at least 15,000 people groups where the work of the Gospel is still to be begun. Let's get it out of our minds forever that the job of world mission is done.

When you hear people saying let's bring the missionaries back to heathen Britain you pull them up short. You agree it's heathen Britain certainly but in comparison with many of the lands you're going to be hearing about this week there is much more opportunity to hear the Gospel here than there's ever going to be in these lands unless the vision for mission of the Christian Church in the West and in Korea and in many other countries is renewed. And the final myth is the myth of the missionary.

I still find many many people today in the church believing that missionaries are some kind of super evangelicals. You know the home worker is here like me the home worker and then the foreign missionary is somewhere way way up here. And the idea is that what the world needs today is competent brilliant evangelists.

I've just been looking around some of the missionary exhibitions some of these exhibitors have put personnel needs up you go and have a look see how many people are crying out for brilliant Billy Graham type evangelists we could do with a few of course but it's not the urgent need of the hour. We do need church planters certainly but we need mechanics we need secretaries we need accountants accountants we need a lot as you can see. We need administrators we need plumbers we need cooks we need ship captains and engineers but that's another story.

Ordinary people people just like me and people just like you are needed throughout the world today. I often challenge people you come and tell me your specific ability your particular qualification and 90% of the time I'll be able to tell you somewhere in the world today where that skill that ability that qualification

could be used for the glory of God and the extension of his kingdom. You Lord Jesus are the Lord of the Universe this is your world and this is your church which you are building.

We thank you that you are in control you are risen from the dead you are ascended far above all principality and might and power and dominion every name that is named the highest place that heaven affords is yours by sovereign right and we bow before you and worship you and acknowledge you as the Lord our Lord my Lord the Lord of your church the head of your church this evening. We thank you that all that the Father has given to you shall come to you and those who come to you will in no way be cast off. Lord we want to build on this confidence this week.

Send us from this tent rejoicing and worshipping keep us worshipping and praying throughout this week together in Jesus name we pray. Amen.

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