SLIDE ONE: TITLE AND SCRIPTURE

The Great Commission

Matthew 28:16-20

Would you stand while we read today's scripture together?

Matthew 28:16-20

Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them. And when they saw him they worshipped him, but some doubted. And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.

So at Spring Grove, we just finished a series called Affirming Our Faith Through the Apostle's Creed. We went line by line to better understand exactly what we are saying and what we believe. Midway through the series, we heard a message from Pastor Brian about Jesus' ascension into heaven and the significance of that event.

After the resurrection, Jesus appeared to his disciples over a period of 40 days before ascending to sit at the right hand of God the Father in heaven. The ascension marked the end of His earthly ministry and the beginning of the mission of His followers to spread the gospel message throughout the world. **The scripture we just read represents Jesus' last command to his disciples.** This command from Jesus is found in all four Gospels as well as in Acts. You'll find it in Mark 16:15-18, Luke 24:44-49, John 20:19-23, and in Acts 1:8. Jesus last command has been called the "Great Commission. **This Great Commission calls Christ's disciples to carry out the work God started by sending his Son into the world to die for lost sinners.**

Today, we're going to break this scripture down into four things that Jesus emphasized when he gave this command to us. His power, His purpose, His plan, and His presence.

But first of all, let's look at the definition of "commission" from Webster's dictionary. It's defined as an authorization or command to act in a prescribed manner or to perform prescribed acts. A commission gives authority to someone to act for, on behalf of, or in

place of another and grants certain powers of authority to carry out the particular task or duty.

Notice this is not called the Great Request or the Great Recommendation, but rather the Great Commission or Command.

So was this just a command to the Apostles' or to all who follow Jesus Christ?

Well, Jesus died to purchase our freedom from sin and death. After our salvation, our lives belong to Jesus Christ and He redeemed us so that we might become useful in His Kingdom. Jesus wants us, His disciples, to share in His work because we are part of His Kingdom and are God's children. He wants everybody to come to know Him and receive His salvation.

On April 14, Dr. Peterman delivered a message at Spring Grove called Caught in the Net. In that message, he used Luke 5:1-11 to share the story of Jesus' fishing experience with Peter. That scripture is the story of when Jesus told Peter to put down his net after he had fished unsuccessfully all day and after Peter reluctantly complied, he caught the biggest catch he had ever caught. And Jesus told him that from now on, you will be fishers for men or live people. One of the key insights from this message was that this was not about Peter or about us, but it was all about a task that our Lord and Savior was giving to us. **He was commanding us to get on board with Him to do His work.**

Some of you may recall that in March, I shared a message about the Evidence for Being a Christian. We asked the question, If you were arrested and charged with being a Christian, would there be enough evidence to convict you. And we explored four bodies of evidence. The first was physical evidence or our behaviors and actions. The second was our interactions with others. Number three was our testimony or specific evidence from others that we are acting like a Christian. **And the fourth body of evidence was conversion which focused on how we are living out the Great Commission.**

God has set before each individual Christian and every Christian Church two infinite journeys. The first one is an internal journey of sanctification. It is a journey of becoming more and more conformed to the image of Christ, imitating Him in every way. This journey does not end until we are with the Lord. The second infinite journey is an external one. It is a journey of advancing the Gospel around the world and making disciples to the end of the earth. Christians glorify God by making progress in both journeys until the Lord brings us home. This is what our Lord leaves us here to do. So the Great Commission was NOT just directed at the Apostles. But at all disciples of Jesus Christ

I've never been a huge sports fan, although I do appreciate the enthusiasm of fans of a particular sport or particular team. But sometimes as I watch a game and watch the

fans' celebration and hysteria when their team wins or just makes a great play, I find myself thinking.. do they think they had anything to do with what just happened? I often hear fans saying "We won" even though they were just spectators. When my dad was alive, sometimes on a Sunday, my brothers would tell him that the Bears won and tell him how great that was. Dad would always turn around and say, did it put any money in my pocket? Given that he had not put down a sports bet on a game, we would of course say NO and he would say, then why do I care?

You see, being a Christian is not a spectator event. We are not to sit on the sidelines or in the bleachers and watch the world go by all around us. It's an all hands on deck fully engaged activity.

Sometimes, we can get caught up in our own little world and the challenges we face and we stay safe and secure, somewhat sheltered from the troubled world we live in. We get comfortable in our own gated communities and within the four walls of our church and sometimes forget that there is a desperate and troubled world out there. And there are many out there who do not know the Lord or have a relationship with Him. **Dr. David Jeremiah says that the Gospel isn't something we come to church to hear, but rather something we go FROM church to tell.**

As I was preparing for this message, God convicted me of something I was proud to pronounce to others and He taught me that I was looking at it the wrong way. I was talking to someone about the calling for me to spend the rest of my life in ministry after leaving corporate America 6 years ago. And that led to a discussion about our church and how we are committed to creating a community of Christian brothers and sisters who do life together. We pray for each other, encourage each other, hold each other accountable, and serve each other and our communities together. So I made the comment that right now, about 90+% of Jan and my social life is with people from the church and church activities. Other than our families, we don't do much with people outside of our church community. I made this statement as an affirmation that we are creating that church community that I dreamed about when I started in ministry. But God convicted me and this question popped into my mind. Then who are you sharing the Gospel with if you spend all your time with those who currently follow Jesus? God put Matthew 5: 29-32 on my heart.

Then Levi held a great banquet for Jesus at his house, and a large crowd of tax collectors and others were eating with them. But the Pharisees and the teachers of the law who belonged to their sect complained to his disciples, "Why do you eat and drink with tax collectors and sinners?"

Jesus answered them, "It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance."

It hit me then that although I truly enjoy spending time with our church family, I can't lose sight of the fact that there are people out there who need to hear the Gospel, that I may not interact with on a regular basis.

Willy Sutton was a famous bank robber back in the early 1900's. When he was caught, the authorities asked him why he robbed banks. He told them because that's where the money is.

If we are to fulfill the Great Commission, we will have to get out of our comfort zones and boldly share the Gospel with others, bearing the risk that we will be rejected, that they may not receive it immediately, that we will be challenged, and that we will come under spiritual attack. We share the Gospel outside of our comfort zone because that's where the non-believers are and those who need to hear it.

The International Missions Board or IMB has a mission to carry out the Great Commission and make disciples of all nations. They plant new churches and share the Gospel around the world. **They state on their website that 59% of the world today is considered unreached — meaning Jesus is largely unknown among 4.6 billion people.**

So there is clearly a lot of work to do.

So let's look at 4 P's that Jesus emphasized when he gave the Great Commission to us. Power, purpose, plan, and presence

SLIDE TWO: POWER: ALL AUTHORITY ON HEAVEN AND EARTH HAS BEEN GIVEN TO ME

The First "P" is Power

Jesus begins by saying that all authority on heaven and earth has been given to me. He is making it clear that we will have His power as we fulfill the command He is giving us. Acts 1:8 says *"You shall receive power when the Holy spirit has come upon you . And you shall be witnesses to Me.*

Remember earlier when we talked about the definition of a commission. We said that a commission gives authority to someone to act for, on behalf of, or in place of another and **grants certain powers of authority** to carry out the particular task or duty. Jesus commissions us, granting us certain powers to share in His work.

And Jesus' authority is a God given right to command us to fulfill this commission. As sinners, we tend to struggle against authority. In our sinful nature, we don't like to be

told what to do. And in the troubled world we live in today, with so many leaders and people with power making decisions that contradict God's Word and commands, it's really difficult to yield to authority. But with Jesus' Authority, it's all good news. We are part of a kingdom in which Jesus is the King. And his laws are good and just. He is our provider and protector. So it's a good thing that we are living in His Kingdom. Since Jesus is the King of the Kingdom of Heaven, we need to understand that it is His right to rule. But also that the authority of Jesus is necessary to overcome obstacles to the spread of His Kingdom. So it's not only justified, but it's needed. There are two things to note about Jesus Authority that flow from this scripture

First, let's look at part of our scripture for today. ***"All authority on heaven and earth has been GIVEN to me".*** Jesus did not take authority. It was granted from God the Father. Jesus is perfectly submissive to the will of the Father so His authority is submissive authority that comes from the Heavenly Father. So since he receives His authority from the Father, He is going to use it to bring everything back to the Father. And when the end comes, Jesus hands over the Kingdom to God after He has destroyed all evil.

Secondly, Jesus has absolute authority over all of creation,, over all of heaven and earth. Every created being is under Jesus. Colossians 1:15-16 says ***The Son is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For in him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things have been created through him and for him.***

So Jesus rules over spiritual forces of evil.. Satan and his demons. And He rules over all earthly forces, including every government and human institution. No political or military, or religious or educational power on earth can stop the spread of the Gospel. So the hope we have as we watch the moral decay going on in the world around us is that God is always in control and always on the throne. All world leaders are under the authority of Jesus Christ.

Because Jesus has been given authority over EVERYTHING, we have a guarantee of ultimate success. It will no doubt be a difficult journey as we face opposition and obstacles, but we know that because of Jesus complete authority, the Great Commission cannot possibly fail. Isaiah 14:26-27 says ***"This is the plan determined for the whole world, this is the hand stretched out over all nations. For the Lord Almighty has purposed and who can thwart Him? His hand stretched out and who can turn it back.'***

SLIDE THREE: PURPOSE: TO MAKE DISCIPLES OF ALL THE NATIONS

The Second "P" is Purpose

Having reminded us of His power, Jesus then turns to the purpose for His Church. To make disciples of all the nations. The purpose is straightforward and simple and focused. **Make disciples.** A disciple means a follower, learner, and one who adheres to a leader and teacher. And notice that He talks about ALL nations. This is a global task. Jesus wants to reach the entire world and it will take the whole church to accomplish this.

SLIDE FOUR: PLAN: Go, Baptize, and Teach

The Third "P" is the Plan

Fulfillment happens when believers witness or share their testimony, preach the Gospel, baptize new converts, and teach the word of God. The PURPOSE of the Great Commission is simply to make disciples of all nations. But Jesus sends us with specific instructions on how to do that. **Go, Baptize, and teach.**

Jesus does not say that we should wait for people to come to us or for them to start asking questions. He tells us to GO. We all go out into the world every day. Go to where the people in need are! This is a global task. Jesus wants to reach the world and it takes all of His church to accomplish this.

We share Christ with others, witness their conversion and baptize them in recognition of their decision to follow Christ. Then we are to teach, instruct, and show them how to observe Jesus' Commands. Acts 1:5 says***: "For John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now."***

John's baptism" was functionally a traditional baptism in Judaism wherein those who accepted his message made a public sign by being submerged in water. John preached about the need to repent of one's sins to receive forgiveness from God. **His water baptism symbolized an intentional turning away from sin and toward God. He knew that full salvation would come through Jesus and the baptism of the Holy Spirit**

I remember hearing a message from a guest preacher about Jesus' first miracle at the wedding in Cana. It was many years ago, but the preacher made a point that I will never forget. He talked about how the servants must have felt when Jesus told them to fill up these big clay jars with water and bring them to the wine steward who was an expert on wine. What a humbling experience, not having any idea what was about to happen. And he left us with the point that our job is to carry the water. It's God's job to convert through the Holy Spirit.

Now it's important to remember that not everyone has the same role to play, but we all have the same purpose in sharing the Gospel of Christ.

In 1 Corinthians 12, Paul talks about the different spiritual gifts given to each of us by the Holy Spirit.

Verses 19-20 say if all were a single member, where would the body be? As it is, there are many parts, yet one body.

And Verses 21-22 say the eye cannot say to the hand, "I have no need of you," nor again the head to the feet, "I have no need of you." On the contrary, the parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable.

For most of my life, other than the typical complaints from being a bit of a closet hypochondriac, I've been pretty healthy. Even though I always tell Jan I think I'm having a heart attack, or I think I'm dying when I get something as simple as a cold, I've never had a heart problem, blood pressure issue, or any kind of chronic condition. But over the past 5-6 years, I have had two specific medical conditions that came close to ending my life. One was an emergency gall bladder removal, and the other was an emergency appendectomy. Notice I'm not talking about my heart, brain, or any other Major organ. The gall bladder and appendix are not exactly the rock stars of our bodies, but it was amazing to me that such a small insignificant organ could end me. Paul reminds us that the body does not function unless ALL parts, not matter how small or seemingly insignificant, operate as God designed them to do.

We are not all called to evangelize from a pulpit and yet we all have a role to play with the Great Commission. It may be as simple as writing a Bible verse in a greeting card to someone or praying earnestly for missionaries around the world, or sharing the love of Christ with others in tangible ways by serving.

I remember when I was a younger Christian I used to watch Billy Graham, or John Maxwell or Chip Ingram preach and think.. why can't I preach like that? Then God spoke to me and reminded me that He has given me different gifts to use to advance His Kingdom.

One of the most impactful books I have ever read is by a guy named Bob Buford called Half Time. He talks about how when we hit 40 years old, our focus shifts from a drive for success to one for significance. In his book, he shares a discussion he had with a CEO friend of his who was considering leaving the business world to become a missionary. And Bob told him, God didn't gift you with leadership skills and the ability to influence people to go to a remote area of the world and be a missionary. You are to use the gifts He has given you where He has placed you.. in the corporate world.

So there are countless ways for us to help fulfill the Great Commission, even if we don't have the spiritual gift of Evangelism or teaching or pastoring.

Let me just share a few.

Support those who work as full time missionaries, pastors, and evangelists and share in their work.

Boldly share your faith with friends, families, or neighbors in every day settings and gatherings

Share the love of Christ in tangible ways so others see Jesus in you.

Pray for the people who don't know Jesus.

Study the Word daily so you can always share the reason for your faith when an opportunity arises.

I was talking to someone the other day about the many times that God puts an opportunity directly in front of us to share the Gospel. The question is whether we will be obedient and arise to the calling.

I remember when I had my gall bladder surgery, that a young orderly was wheeling me through the hospital to the operating room. And he started small talk asking me what I did for living. Wow. Where did that come from! Obviously, God was putting an opportunity in front of me to share my faith and the Gospel. When I told him I was a Pastor, he started opening up about his faith journey and questions he had. I don't know what happened afterward because I never say him again. But God used me to carry the water. And the outcome was left with the Holy Spirit.

SLIDE FIVE: PRESENCE: HE WILL BE WITH US ALWAYS, EVEN TO THE END OF THE AGE

The Fourth "P" is Presence

Jesus ends the great Commission by assuring us of His presence. He tells us that He will be with us always, even to the end of the age.

Christians do not have to strive to fulfill the Great Commission. The Holy spirit empowers believers to carry out the Great Commission AND is the One who convicts people of their need for a Savior. John 16:7-11 says ***"But very truly I tell you, it is for your good that I am going away. Unless I go away, the Advocate will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you. [8] When he comes, he will prove the world to be in the wrong about sin and righteousness and judgment: [9] about sin, because people do not believe in me; [10] about righteousness, because I am going to the Father, where you can see me no longer; [11] and about judgment, because the prince of this world now stands condemned.'***

Our job is to plant seeds and carry the water and let the Holy spirit handle the conversion. We can do nothing without the Holy spirit. We must step out in boldness and faith as we follow Him. Avoid getting caught up in fears of being inadequate, not knowing what to say or not feeling as though we have the courage to do as God commands. **Don't be afraid to say, Yes, Lord.** God does not call the equipped. He equips the called. He calls us and then gives us the Holy Spirit to equip us for the work He has called us to do.

Remember how when God called Moses to lead his people out of Egypt, Moses asked him to choose someone else. He said I don't speak well. And when Gideon was called upon to serve God's purpose, he said I'm the smallest person in the smallest tribe in the smallest family. Choose someone else. And remember, God didn't choose Pharisees or well learned people to be his disciples… he chose fishermen who were not very high on the social ladder. And of course, don't forget about Paul, the greatest evangelist ever. He used to persecute Christians and have them killed and God called him for His purpose and equipped him to carry out the Great Commission. **Do NOT underestimate what God can accomplish through each and every one of us who say YES and is obedient to His command.**

When we share our faith, have personal conversations, and live out our lives so others can see Jesus in us, it isn't about us. The Holy Spirit is the real power and He uses some of our words or actions for His purpose. The power is not in our personality or our intellect or our skills of persuasion. As soon as we start thinking it's about us, we set ourselves up for disappointment if someone doesn't accept the Lord as the result of an interaction with us.

We are involved in disciple making every day as people watch our lives and see Christ in us.

As I bring this to a close, I want to once again state that many Christians consider the Great Commission as a suggestion, not a command. This leads to a lack of evangelizing, baptizing, and multiplying the Kingdom in the daily lives of others.

When we reviewed the fourth body of evidence for being a Christian back in March that was focused on the Great Commision, we explored a number of questions that a jury would consider in deciding if there was enough evidence to convict you of being a Christian.

How many people have you invited to church?

How many have you shared the Gospel with?

How often have you invited someone to an event or to your home where they might hear about Christ?

Do you pray for others, even if they don't ask or if you don't know where they are with their faith?

Do people ask you to pray for them or do you boldly ask others if you can pray for them?

Do people come to you with questions or advice about their faith?

Do you talk about your faith openly and with conviction, with no concern about our cancel culture?

Do you know where to get answers to questions others may ask?

What would be your legacy? What will others say about you when you go on to eternity?

The answers to all of these questions are just a few of the ways you can help fulfill the Great Commission, even if your spiritual gift is not evangelism or teaching or pastoring.

I have shared this before with some of you, but it bears repeating. Some of you may know Penn and Teller, the comedians who are openly atheist. Penn made a statement once that he doesn't understand Christians. He said that if he were walking down the street and saw a bus bearing down on a person, he would do everything in his power to pull him out of the way of sudden death. So if Christians really believe what we believe, why are we not doing everything we can to bring people into a relationship with God.

We have to ask ourselves. If we believe that we hold the key to salvation in our relationship with Jesus. And know that this message could save someone from an eternity separated from God and they would have eternal life in a relationship with a loving father, why in the world would we choose not to share it with others?

There could be any number of reasons.

Could we just be seeing the Great Commission as something directed to the Apostles and not all Christians?

Could we think someone else will do it or it's not my responsibility?

Could we think it is only something for our overseas missionaries?

Could it be that it seems like too daunting of a task for us?

Do we not recognize the urgency of this command?

Could we be too distracted with our own lives or too busy to listen when the Holy Spirit prompts us to share?

I would like to ask you today as you think about this message to ask the Lord to reveal what is stopping us from obeying His command and ask Him to give us a passion for sharing the Good News. **And regardless of what the reason is, we must all take practical steps in our daily lives to help accomplish this last Command from Jesus.**

The Lord intends to send us, to send his church to the ends of the earth, empowering us with His spirit making disciples until the end of time. When we give an account of our lives on judgement day, we all long to hear God tell us, well done my good and faithful servant. And we pray that we will have no regrets at that time about our commitment to the Great commission.

The great commission is not a suggestion. It is a divine Mandate, Jesus has entrusted us with the responsibility of making disciples, baptizing them and teaching them to obey His commands and He assures us that He will be with us every step of the way

Let me pray for us.

Heavenly Father, we thank You for the Great Commission entrusted to us by your son, Jesus Christ. Grant us the wisdom, strength, and courage to fulfil this sacred duty. May your presence be with us always as we make disciples, baptize them, and teach others to obey your commands. In Jesus name we pray. Amen