

Lesson 58

The Great Commission

Group Icebreaker:

What is God's will for your life?

Introduction:

Forty days had passed since Jesus was raised from the dead. During that time He told the disciples many things concerning the kingdom of God and opened their minds to understand the Scriptures. He explained to them that it was written that the Christ would suffer and rise again from the dead on the third day and that repentance for forgiveness of sins would be proclaimed in His name to all the nations beginning at Jerusalem. And He told them that they were to be witnesses of those things.

On the fortieth day Jesus gathered the disciples together and led them out of Jerusalem to a place on the Mount of Olives near Bethany.¹ When they arrived He commanded them not to leave Jerusalem until He had baptized them with the Holy Spirit a few days hence. Somewhat puzzled they inquired of Him if He was going to restore the kingdom to Israel at that time. He replied that it wasn't for them to know the times or epochs established by the Father but that they would receive power when the Holy Spirit came upon them.

Then He issued His last set of commands, which today has come to be known as the "Great Commission". After that He blessed the disciples and ascended into heaven while they watched. They were awestruck! As Jesus continued to rise, a cloud² received Him out of their sight. Then two angels appeared and told them that He would one day return to earth in the same manner that they had seen Him leave.

Group Discussion:

1. If you had been with the disciples that day, what questions would have been running through your mind?

Reading the Scripture:

Final Instructions – The Great Commission³
Matthew 28:18-20, Mark 16:15-19, Luke 24:44-53, Acts 1:3-12

Scripture excerpts from "Follow Me: A Message from God"

31 AD, June 5th, Thursday – Iyyar 27

Now He said to them, "These are My words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all things which are written about Me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the

¹ Bethany was the home of Lazarus, Mary and Martha. It is located on the southeastern side of the Mount of Olives about a two-mile journey from Jerusalem.

² The specific cloud that is being talked about in Hebrew is called the Sh'khinah: the cloud of glory. It is the same cloud that led the Israelites in their wilderness wanderings, became a pillar of fire at night and filled the Temple of God. It always indicates the presence of God

³ **The Great Commission:** The basic commission was to make new disciples. To this, Jesus specified the method involved in accomplishing that task. The fulfillment of the various components is recorded in the Acts of the Apostles. Below is a list of the initial fulfillment of the individual components: 1) **Go into all the world** - Acts 2:1-6, 2), **Preach the Gospel** - Acts 2:22-36, 3) **Baptizing** - Acts 2:28-41, 4) **Teaching them to observe all that Jesus had commanded them** - Acts 2:42.

Psalms must be fulfilled." Then He opened their minds to understand the Scriptures, and He said to them, "Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and rise again from the dead the third day; and that repentance for forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in His name to all the nations, beginning from Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things. And behold, I am sending forth the promise of My Father upon you; but you are to stay in the city until you are clothed with power from on high." And He led them out as far as Bethany, and He lifted up His hands and blessed them. And He said to them, "Go⁴ into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation. 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. He who has believed and has been baptized shall be saved; but he who has disbelieved shall be condemned. And these signs will accompany those who have believed: in My name they will cast out demons, they will speak with new tongues; they will pick up serpents, and if they drink any deadly poison, it shall not hurt them; they will lay hands on the sick, and they will recover." So then, when the Lord Jesus had spoken to them, He was received up into heaven, and sat down at the right hand of God. And they returned to Jerusalem with great joy, and were continually in the temple, praising God. And they went out and preached everywhere, while the Lord worked with them, and confirmed the word by the signs that followed.

The Commands:

- ❖ But you are to stay in the city until you are clothed with power from on high.
- ❖ Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation.
- ❖ Make disciples
- ❖ Baptize them in the **name** of the Father, and the Son and the Holy Spirit.
- ❖ Teaching them to observe all that I commanded you.

The Lesson:

Jesus had a way of making His points memorable and they certainly weren't subtle. When He issued His last set of commands to the disciples He coupled it with His ascension into heaven. Talk about emphasis! Most of us are readily able to recall the first and last items on a "to do" list we are given because our brains are wired that way. But Jesus made sure the disciples didn't forget the first and last things He told them.

Think back to Jesus' first command⁵ to the disciples. It was "Follow Me". And Jesus issued it in conjunction with a miraculous fishing trip. The point He was making to them was, "I want you to **hear** and **obey** my voice and when you **do** what I have told you miraculous things will happen that bring blessing." With the command to "Follow Me" Jesus also promised the disciples that He

⁴ **Go.** (participle) shouldn't even be translated "go" but "as you are going" or "while going".

⁵ This compares favorably with the very first command that God gave the Israelites at Mount Sinai, "**Hear O** Israel" (**Hear.** The Hebrew word '*shema*'. – See article on page 137 ("What does the Hebrew term 'Shema' mean?") for a full explanation). Even though the Israelites had agreed to obey God's voice, when He actually spoke to them they became fearful and pleaded that He speak to them no more. Instead, they said they would hear and obey Moses. But they didn't do that either.

In some ways those who profess to be Christians are like the Israelites. When they hear what Jesus wants them to do they become fearful and won't follow Him. Instead, they say, "Pastor you tell us what we should do." But then they won't do that either. Jesus said, "*Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven will enter. Therefore everyone who hears these words of Mine and acts on them, may be compared to a wise man who built his house on the rock.*" (Matthew 7:21 and 24)

would make them fishers of men. And now, three and one-half years later Jesus was commissioning them to do that very thing.

So then, when the Lord Jesus had spoken to them, He was received up into heaven, and sat down at the right hand of God. And they returned to Jerusalem with great joy, and were continually in the temple, praising God. And they went out and preached everywhere, while the Lord worked with them, and confirmed the word by the signs that followed.

At the heart of the Great Commission is the imperative to make disciples. It was Jesus' full time occupation from the day He entered ministry at His baptism until He ascended into heaven. During His 3½ years of ministry, Jesus modeled the process of making disciples and then commanded all those who had followed Him to do likewise. The discipleship process involves five steps. They are:

1. **Stay** in the city until you are clothed with power from on high.
2. **Go** into all the world.
3. **Preach** repentance for the forgiveness of sins in Jesus name.
4. **Baptize** those who believe the message ... in the name of Jesus.
5. **Teach** those who have been baptized to observe all that Jesus commanded.

The disciples followed Jesus' instructions perfectly and the initial results are played out in the pages of the book of Acts:

1. **Stay** – Acts 1:12-14

Then they returned to Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet, which is near Jerusalem, a Sabbath day's journey away. When they had entered the city, they went up to the upper room where they were staying; that is, Peter and John and James and Andrew, Philip and Thomas, Bartholomew and Matthew, James the son of Alphaeus, and Simon the Zealot, and Judas the son of James. These all with one mind were continually devoting themselves to prayer, along with the women, and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with His brothers.

2. **Go** – Acts 2:1-6

When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. And suddenly there came from heaven a noise like a violent rushing wind, and it filled the whole house where they were sitting. And there appeared to them tongues as of fire distributing themselves, and they rested on each one of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit was giving them utterance. Now there were Jews living in Jerusalem, devout men from every nation under heaven. And when this sound occurred, the crowd came together, and were bewildered because each one of them was hearing them speak in his own language.

3. **Preach** – Acts 2:22-36

“Men of Israel, listen to these words: Jesus the Nazarene, a man attested to you by God with miracles and wonders and signs which God performed through Him in your midst, just as you yourselves know— this Man, delivered over by the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God, you nailed to a cross by the hands of godless men and put Him to death. But God raised Him up again, putting an end to the agony of death, since it was impossible for Him to be held in its power. For David says of Him, ‘I SAW THE LORD ALWAYS IN MY PRESENCE; FOR HE IS AT MY RIGHT HAND, SO THAT I WILL NOT BE SHAKEN. THEREFORE MY HEART WAS GLAD AND MY TONGUE EXULTED; MOREOVER MY FLESH ALSO WILL LIVE IN HOPE; BECAUSE YOU WILL NOT ABANDON MY SOUL TO HADES, NOR ALLOW YOUR HOLY ONE TO UNDERGO

DECAY. YOU HAVE MADE KNOWN TO ME THE WAYS OF LIFE; YOU WILL MAKE ME FULL OF GLADNESS WITH YOUR PRESENCE.’ Brethren, I may confidently say to you regarding the patriarch David that he both died and was buried, and his tomb is with us to this day. And so, because he was a prophet and knew that GOD HAD SWORN TO HIM WITH AN OATH TO SEAT one OF HIS DESCENDANTS ON HIS THRONE, he looked ahead and spoke of the resurrection of the Christ, that HE WAS NEITHER ABANDONED TO HADES, NOR DID His flesh SUFFER DECAY. This Jesus God raised up again, to which we are all witnesses. Therefore having been exalted to the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, He has poured forth this which you both see and hear. For it was not David who ascended into heaven, but he himself says: ‘THE LORD SAID TO MY LORD, SIT AT MY RIGHT HAND, UNTIL I MAKE YOUR ENEMIES A FOOTSTOOL FOR YOUR FEET.’ Therefore let all the house of Israel know for certain that God has made Him both Lord and Christ—this Jesus whom you crucified.”

4. **Baptize** – Acts 2:37-41

Now when they heard this, they were pierced to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, “Brethren, what shall we do?” Peter said to them, “Repent, and each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off, as many as the Lord our God will call to Himself.” And with many other words he solemnly testified and kept on exhorting them, saying, “Be saved from this perverse generation!” So then, those who had received his word were baptized; and that day there were added about three thousand souls.

5. **Teach** – Acts 2:42

They were continually devoting themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.

Group Discussion:

2. What is a disciple? (One who receives instruction, a learner or pupil.)

The process of making disciples closely resembles the natural process that men and women go through to have and raise children. Let’s take a look at the comparison.

1. Stay (until you are capable of reproduction and have found a mate)
2. Go (leave father and mother – *Genesis 2:24*)
3. Preach (plant a seed – *Genesis 2:24*)
4. Baptize (washing at live birth)
5. Teach (equip the child so he can be successful and raise his own children)
 - a. The child is a **disciple** as he is the one who receives instruction.
 - b. This maturing stage has three stages:

Spiritual Maturity – (1 John 2:13) Natural Maturity

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|--------------|-------------|
| 1. Child | Childhood |
| 2. Young man | Adolescence |
| 3. Father | Adulthood |

The Point of the Lesson:

God has given us:

- His **Vision** of what we are to become . . . like His son, Jesus.

- The **Mission** we are to accomplish . . . to make disciples.
- The **Strategy** we are to use . . .
 - Go into all the world.
 - Preach the message of forgiveness of sins in Jesus name
 - Baptize those who have believed the message.
 - Teach them to observe everything that Jesus commanded to do.
- And the **Ministry** we are to perform . . . the ministry of reconciliation.

In order to do this work He has also given us:

- His **Authority** . . . to accomplish the mission and ministry.
- His **Power** . . . the Holy Spirit.
- His **Tools** . . . the gifts of the Holy Spirit.
- His **Glory** . . . the fruit of the Holy Spirit.
- His **Equippers** . . . apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers.

Application:

As we close this last lesson, be reminded that you have now gone through the spiritual maturity process and the responsibility is yours to accomplish the will of your Father in heaven. The Journey With Jesus series of books will help give you a guideline to accomplish the task that is set before you. Will you do it?

The things which you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses, entrust these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also. (2 Timothy 2:2)