

The Great Commission is NOT these 4 Things

The closing of Matthew's gospel is not just a tidy end to his book; these last few verses are the marching orders for the church:

The eleven disciples traveled to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had directed them. When they saw him, they worshiped, but some doubted. Jesus came near and said to them, "All authority has been given to me in heaven and on earth. 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 everything I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age" (Matt. 28:16-20).

Here is one of those passages that, if we ever wonder what God's will is for our lives, we can come back to again and again, for here is the answer. What does God want me to do? He wants me to go and make disciples. Just like He said. So I wonder today, in this post, you would think with me not just about what these parting words of Jesus say, but also what they do NOT say. In that spirit, here are four things the Great Commission is NOT:

1. Negotiable.

The lasting command Jesus gave to the church is couched in His authority. Before He said to go, before He said to make disciples, Jesus wanted everyone to know the position from which He was speaking. This is not a life hack; it's not some good advice; it's not a request. This is a command, one rooted in the authority of Jesus.

Here we see the Son of God, the King of the Universe, the One through whom and in whom all things hang together. He has died and risen from the grave as the Conqueror of sin and death. And is taking His rightful place at the right hand of God the Father. From that position of authority, indeed all authority in heaven and on earth, He issues this command. Because of His authority, Jesus' commission is not negotiable for any of us.

We should beware, then, of all the ways we tend to try and negotiate with Jesus. We hold up our circumstances, our supposed limitations, our special instances, but they are of no consequence. That doesn't mean Jesus doesn't care about them; it does mean, though, that they do not excuse us from this command.

2. Restrictive.

This is a very inclusive command. Jesus began His command with a non-restrictive description of His authority with the word "all." With His "all" authority, we are to go to "all" nations. And when we go to "all" nations, we are to teach people to obey "everything." There is nothing left out here; nothing pushed to the side. And here, too, we should be careful that we don't either intentionally or unintentionally restrict that which is meant to be loosed.

We should be careful that we don't restrict the "who" of the Great Commission. Like Jonah,

there are certain groups of people that are uncomfortable for us to speak to. There are all kinds of reasons for that – maybe it's our past experience, perhaps it's our upbringing, or maybe it's the state of current events. But if we are Christians, then the Great Commission calls us to confront our political, racial, and socio-economic biases. It's an inclusive command for us to cross the lines we've drawn in our hearts.

But we should also be careful that we don't restrict the "what" of the Great Commission. It's not lost on Jesus that some of His teaching is hard to stomach. He saw it happen when He taught Himself – every time He stepped up to a crowd it was always thinner when He got done as people were confronted with the full implications of following Him. Ironically, we might talk ourselves into restricting some of the teachings of Jesus to try and make Jesus more palatable to those around us. But Jesus doesn't need our help with that; He's not asking for our help – in fact, He's not asking at all. He's commanding our faithfulness.

3. Complicated.

The Great Commission is not negotiable; it's not restrictive; it's also just not that complicated. We are to go. We are to share. And we are to bring others along the road of following Jesus. That's it. And when you look at it like that, it's really not that complicated. One might wonder, then, why we tend to make it so.

If we think about other parts of life that we tend to overcomplicate we might come up with a reason or two. For me, I know one of the reasons I tend to overcomplicate something is out of sheer procrastination. I know something needs to be done and I feel either unprepared or unexcited about doing it. So complicating an issue like that is a neat way around actually getting busy – it's because the more I talk around something, the longer I don't have to actually do it. And as an added bonus, it actually looks like I'm doing the very thing I'm subconsciously avoiding.

4. Easy.

But it's at this point that we should recognize the difference between simple, and easy. Just because something is simple, doesn't mean it doesn't take effort. And cost. And pain of one sort or another. That's true in obeying Jesus' instructions. More times than not, they're actually pretty simple. But there is difficulty in their simplicity.

It will cost us to obey Jesus' commission. We will have to go, and if we have to go, then we will have to leave. And we will have to make disciples, and if we are making disciples, it will mean we have to give up some other things in our lives we are spending time and resources on. Make no mistake – living out Jesus' Great Commission requires a drastic reordering of our lives. That's not easy, but Jesus' promises us it's worth it.

These words of Jesus? They're not negotiable, restrictive, complicated or easy – but they are the words of the One with all authority. So we must ask ourselves when confronted again by this familiar passage – are we following Jesus, or aren't we?

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