

The Great Commission is...

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Date: 02 October 2011

Preacher: Don Coleman

[0:00] Gene Mims, and you may or may not be familiar with Gene Mims, has written a number of books on church growth and been very involved in Southern Baptist life over the years.

And Gene Mims wrote a book a number of years ago entitled Kingdom Principles for Church Growth. And in it, he presented what he called the 154 Principle of Church Growth.

Just remember those numbers, 154. And basically, the book is organized around that principle, 154. Now, what do the numbers stand for?

Well, according to Mims, the church has one commission. One commission. We call it the Great Commission. And that one commission is accomplished through five functions.

And he lists them this way and describes them. You could probably guess what some of them are. Evangelism. Discipleship. Ministry.

[1:23] That is, in the sense of meeting people's needs in Jesus' name. Fellowship and worship. Those five functions. And I might add a sixth. That would be prayer. But you'd be hard-pressed to find any others to add to that list.

They really do encompass all the ministries of the church. And it is through these ministries or functions, as Mims calls them, that the Great Commission is accomplished.

So, one commission, accomplished through five functions that lead to four results.

Very logical, the way he has put it. And I think he's done a pretty good job. And these four results, according to Gene Mims, would be, number one, growth of the church spiritually.

Number two, growth of the church numerically. Third, expansion of ministries. Expanding the ministries.

[2:27] Various ministries as the church grows. And, very key, advances in missions. We advance further and further out from our church with the gospel of Jesus Christ.

So, the 154 principle. Now, my sermon is not to convey all of the ins and outs and substance of Gene Mims' principle. But I begin that way because what I want us to focus on is the one commission.

That's the beginning place. And we don't have two or three or four commissions or commands. We have one. One great commission.

Now, throughout the month of October, I've mentioned this a couple of times over the last several Sundays, I'm going to be focusing and our church is going to be focusing on missions.

The one commission that we have. And each week, we're going to highlight specific features of our strategy for missions, as has been put together by our Acts 1-8 missions team.

[3:39] And we'll get into that over the next several weeks. But we need to understand, hopefully acknowledge, that we are a great commission church.

We are. Now, let me qualify that and say we did not choose to be that. Not an optional thing, something we choose to be.

We are that because we were commissioned by our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Now, obviously, we can choose to disobey that commission. And many churches have.

And as individual believers, because the commission involves individual believers, collectively we define a church.

But since the commission is given to individuals, we can choose to disobey that commission. And many do. Or we can choose to obey.

[4:39] And I've got a good idea. Let's choose to obey. Obey that commission. Now, what is the commission?

Or maybe I should say it this way. What exactly is? What is? Just exactly. What is this commission? And I think probably ten years ago, maybe further back, that would be a silly question to ask of

Southern Baptists because we have emphasized, possibly more than any other denomination, the Great Commission.

And we've always known what it was. But do we still? No. And I think it's important for us to begin there. And that's why I'm beginning there with this message.

What exactly is the Great Commission? An analysis of the early Christian church, as it is described for us in the book of Acts, and it is in quite a lot of detail, that analysis will reveal an important truth. In fact, I might even call it an axiom. An axiom. And this axiom has remained true ever since, over the centuries of the Christian church.

[6:00] And it will continue to remain true until Jesus comes again. And so what is this axiom or truth? It's simply this.

The local church, and that's what we are, local body of believers, baptized believers, we're the local church. A local church grows as its members do as the Lord commanded.

It's axiomatic. Almost a given. Now, we don't make people get saved and make the church grow.

That's God's business. But the axiom still remains true. The local church will grow as believers do as God commanded.

As God commanded. And doing what? Well, a lot of things. But we could boil it down to these four things. Proclaiming the message of redemption in Christ Jesus and proclaiming it to the world.

[7:03] That would be one of the things that we need to do. Baptizing those who believe. Teaching them God's Word.

And reminding everyone, all of us, reminding us of God's wonderful promise that He has promised to be with us to the end of the world.

Now, what do we call that? Yeah, I heard it. The Great Commission. That's what it is.

We call it the Great Commission. And someone has rightly said that obedience to the Great Commission is the basis upon which God will bless and grow His churches.

Now, we could grow in other ways. And there are certainly some churches, quote, and I quote loosely, some churches that have vast memberships and big attendance and they're not involved in the Great Commission.

[8:05] But I mean real growth. The real growth and real blessing of the church is on the basis of our obedience to the Great Commission.

All right. I come back to the question, what is this Great Commission? What is it? Well, to answer that question, we need to, of course, turn to the Word of God.

And by the way, the Great Commission is found, recorded in Scripture four times. Did you know that? We normally think of Matthew 28, 18, and we'll certainly include that one.

But there are four times that Jesus issues His command. And this morning, I want us to look at all four references to Christ's commissioning of His church and we'll bring these together.

And by bringing them together, we're going to discover, maybe for the first time, some of us, exactly what the Great Commission is.

[9:09] All right. So let's look at each of these passages in the order in which they appear in the Bible. The first one is in Matthew 28, verses 18 through 20.

Matthew 28, verses 18 through 20. And let me read it for you. And Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, 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 all things that I have commanded you.

And, lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age. The second one is in Mark's Gospel.

Mark 16, verses 15 and 16.

And He said to them, Go into all the world and preach the Gospel to every creature.

[10:13] He who believes and is baptized will be saved. But he who does not believe will be condemned. That's the Great Commission. That's the Great Commission. Recorded by Mark.

Then we can go to Luke. Luke's Gospel. Luke chapter 24. Luke 24, verses 46 to 49.

And then He said to them, this is Jesus again speaking, Thus it is written, and thus it was necessary for Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead the third day, and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem.

And you are witnesses of these things. Behold, I send the promise of My Father upon you, but tarry in the city of Jerusalem until you are endued with power from on high.

And then one more, and that carries us into the book of Acts. Again, Luke is the author. John does not include Jesus' commission.

[11:23] We're not to make anything out of that. He just doesn't. And he was inspired by the Holy Spirit, and so it's not his fault. Alright? But Luke also includes a commission.

A commission that was given just before Jesus ascended up into heaven. And it's Acts chapter 1 and verse 8. But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.

Alright? There they are. All four of the commissions recorded in Scripture as they appear in their order. Now, having read these passages, these passages that record our Great Commission that our Lord Jesus gave to us, let me suggest several truths about what the Great Commission is as compared to what it is not.

Alright? What it is as compared to what it is not. Number one, the Great Commission of our Lord is to be the rule, not the exception.

It's to be the rule, not the exception. Now, remembering Matthew's reference to the Great Commission, I would point out to you that all of the verbs in the Great Commission, all four of them, there are four, but all of the verbs but one of them are instructive.

[12:58] They're instructive verbs. Three out of the four give us instruction. They're not commands. They're not imperatives. They are instructive to us, and we can pick those out very easily.

Go, therefore. Now, that sounds like a command, but it's really a participle. And so, it really could be translated, going, therefore, then baptizing them, and then teaching them.

Those three are not written as commands, imperatives. They're instructive. They're instructive. And they serve to instruct the church on what to do and how to do it as we seek to fulfill the Great Commission that Jesus gave us.

Alright? So, there are three verbs and they're instructive. But, and you probably know this, the key verb in the commission as recorded there in Matthew's Gospel, the key verb is an imperative.

And, if you're reading from a King James version of the Bible, you might notice there that the verb is translated with the word teach. Do you see that there if you have a King James?

[14:09] Teach all nations. But the word there means to be one's disciple. It means to follow one's teachings and instructions and so in nearly every other version of the Bible, it is translated make disciples.

Not teach all nations, but make disciples of all nations. And that is more correct. That's what we're commanded to do. Now, it says to go, yes.

It says to baptize, baptizing them. And the commission says teaching them and all those things are important. But the imperative, first and foremost, that we're to see in the commission is the imperative to make disciples.

To make disciples. That's the key to understanding this commission. And listen, when and how did we get the idea that great commission work is an optional duty for us to be involved in?

When did the church kind of move, start to move in that direction and now find herself in that place where the believers, many of them, have the idea that this is an optional thing to be involved in?

[15:30] That is great commission work. And when did we lose our evangelistic zeal or focus and start making fellowship the priority?

At some point, the church began to focus more on fellowship than on great commission work. There isn't anything wrong with fellowship and we need to have fellowship and always from the very beginning there has been an emphasis in scripture concerning fellowship of the believers and I'm all for that and we need to cultivate that certainly.

But when did we replace the great commission with the priority of fellowship? or if not fellowship, how about activities? Certain activities in the church or if not that, some churches have replaced the great commission with social emphases, social issues and concerns and so in the church from the pulpit to the ministries of the church the focus seems to be on dealing with social and moral issues in our society and we need to be involved in those things but when did we think that should take the priority over the great commission?

Remember we've been given one commission. Do we take God's word seriously? I hope so. Do we not fear him?

See, the great commission is commanded. It's not suggested. And that's why I say that it is to be the rule not the exception. Jesus said to his disciples in Matthew 28, 18 and I'll paraphrase it. [17:11] He said all powers and authority have been given to me and so by way of authority I say to you by way of command to you my blood bought children make disciples.

It could not be any clearer. And so first of all the great commission is to be the rule without the exception. Second, the great commission is accomplished with power not program. I tell you we Southern Baptists need to understand this, learn this. We are so program oriented and program dependent.

But the great commission is power not program. Programs become tools and I'm all for that and there are tools that we can use in order to obey the commission.

But on the front end of it it is not a program it is a plan. It's not it's a power. See I'm so Southern Baptist I cannot replace power with plan.

[18:25] It's power power. And it's so clear. You know in the commission there's a promise isn't there? And we don't often emphasize the promise that is found there.

But in Matthew 28 30 Jesus said and lo I am with you always even to the end of the age. Now folks that's a promise isn't it? And that promise involves his presence.

That's what the promise is. But added to the promise of his presence there we ought to say a word about the provision that is found there. In Acts chapter 1 verse 8 Jesus said that you shall receive power.

Power. When? When the Holy Spirit has come upon you and you shall be witnesses. And so the provision is the power of God.

Now in Luke's commission or record of the commission Luke has Jesus saying to his disciples Terry wait until you have or are endued with power from on high.

[19:30] And he certainly said that to his disciples. But we don't have to wait because that's already happened. It happened in Pentecost. And so the presence and the power of God already reside in the church because the presence and power of God reside in every individual born again believer.

And so when do we realize this presence and experience this power? Well this is interesting I think because in the commission itself we have Jesus saying first of all go therefore and then he says lo I will be with you.

Do you get it? See the go comes before the lo that is go therefore and lo I will be with you. We're not waiting for him to be present we're going and he's present with us as we go as we're involved in his commission and so I guess we could say by way of implication if there's no going there's no I will be with you I will be with you so the great commission what is it it's rule not exception it's power not program and third the great commission is for glory and here's another mistake we make Matthew 28 19 tells us that the great commission that great commission work must be done in the name of the father and of the son and of the holy spirit now what do you imagine typically motivates southern baptists to obey the great commission what typically motivates us do you think what drives us what what what typically is our objective our primary objective to glorify god or to grow our church well that's the right answer but that's not typical okay it's not typical of us just think about it you've called me to be your pastor

I'm glad that you did and you believe that I'm the right man for your church and so think about it what is it that you're hoping will be the result of my ministry here grow the church well I hope that happens did you understand my point what is our focus our priority in great commission is it the glory of God or the growth of the church very shortly we're going to be searching for a youth pastor a new youth pastor to lead that portion of our ministry and how will you gauge his success you just fill in the blank there a strong music ministry and worship ministry is important isn't it and I enjoy ours I very much appreciate Jonathan but why do we want a strong dynamic music ministry what is it that's behind our desire say for certain kinds of music and styles of music what's the motivation behind that and we have

Sunday school and the Awana ministry and men's and women's ministries and grow ministry which is should be all about the Great Commission and so forth and why do we have these things do you see my point it's a point we need to get because the glory of God must be our primary focus in all that we do our primary objective not growth of the church whose business is it to grow the church it's the Lord's business and he will if we're obedient to his commission but we're obedient to the commission first and foremost to glorify him bring glory to him we do that through obedience and a

host of other ways and really I think it should be said that any so called growth of a church is really just a sham apart from

[24:02] God getting the glory for everything that we do and that being our prime objective in fact our only objective alright so great commission rule not exception with power not program for glory not growth and then fourth the great commission is about a person not a plan a person not a plan of me right that's what it says now folks the great commission or great commission work is not following some formula for soul winning anything wrong with having a formula or some plan of salvation whether it's the

Roman road or some other method is there anything wrong with that no I'm not saying there's anything wrong with that but that itself is not the great commission and if we think that just laying out the plan is it then we've missed something because the great commission is introducing lost people to a person a person Jesus Christ and it is first and foremost it is the person not the plan that brings lost people to salvation remember the words of that old chorus Jesus Jesus Jesus there's just something about that name love that chorus master savior

Jesus like the fragrance after the rain Jesus Jesus Jesus that's how the words go let all heaven and earth proclaim kings and kingdoms will all pass away but there's just something about that name oh how we need to remember that the great commission the commission we've all been commanded to fulfill individually collectively as a church whether that is working itself out there where you work wherever or here or in the course of some ministry of this church no matter what the context is we need to keep at the forefront of our minds that we're introducing people to a person not a plan where if they will say this and that and do this they're saved alright so the great commission the rule not exception with power not program for glory not growth about a person not a plan and then number five the great commission is to be global not just local global not just local one of the common denominators in each of the four recorded commissions in the bible is the scope the scope that is the scope of the great commission or maybe I can put it in these terms the reach of it the reach of the great commission how far out is it to reach as we obey the commission well

Matthew 28 19 for example says make disciples of all nations all nations and by the way the word nations is the Greek word *ethnos* we get our word ethnic from it and it means peoples we could translate it that way of all peoples or we could expand it to the normal term people groups and there are literally thousands and thousands of so called people groups living on this planet not just simply identifiable nations we could boil those down to really a few a manageable few but there are thousands of people groups people groups that have distinct sometimes distinct languages and cultures and such and we're commanded here by Jesus to go to each one of those people groups all nations mark 16 15 in his record of the commission he's

Jesus says go into all the world cosmos the whole world and preach the gospel that's what we're to do over the whole world and he says preach the gospel to every creature every creature every creature of man okay not cows and pigs and you know those kind of creatures and you see see the reach of the gospel the reach of the commission is very clear Luke in his record in Luke 24 47 he says Jesus says repentance and remission of sin should be preached that's by the way the word *kerusso* herald like an official herald to be preached heralded in his name in Jesus name to all nations there it is again *ethnos* acts 1 8 spells it out in very clear terms you shall be witnesses of me in where

[30:06] Jerusalem and in all Judea and in Samaria and to the end of the earth and so the point is pretty clear isn't it the great commission a great commission church which is what we need to be sees the world as our responsibility and that's why we must model our great commission strategy after acts 1 8 it is a strategy Jerusalem our city Judea our state Samaria our country the ends of the earth our world and Jesus said we're to be witnesses in every circle of that scope to the end of the earth now that really is a bare bones biblical outline for missions and what I hope to do over the next several weeks is to flesh that outline flesh it out so that we can see how we plug in to the entire reach or scope of the great commission it's to be global not just local now for sure

I think we are called upon to place most of our resources right here where we live but if we just stay here not involve ourselves in the Judea and Samaria and the world then we are not really fulfilling the commission in its entirety alright let's move on number six the great commission involves making disciples not decisions you know if we worked it a certain way and your preacher say preached a certain way and and issued an invitation in a certain way and we did some of our our ministries and did it with a certain way in a certain way we could fill this building up we could really

could actually all I could have to do is just heal somebody here right here in your presence and next Sunday we'd have a packed crowd we really would or at least make it appear that I healed somebody something there are a lot of ways to fill a building and and by the way there are a lot of very emotional ways and manipulative ways to get people to make decisions and they come down the aisle and they quote join the church and then they're here for a few weeks and then after a month who knows where they went the great commission involves disciples making disciples not just decisions in fact we don't have anything to do with the decision now we share the gospel faithfully plead with people to repent and come to Christ just like the Bible does but the decision is something goes on inside the heart and that is the the work of God that's his work it's to make disciples remember that's the imperative of the great commission just just one imperative make disciples what is it make disciples and if this is the only imperative verb of the great commission and it is grammatically speaking and if it is the only specific command that is issued to us as the great commission then

I'm going to say to you that it must be this one verb this one imperative must be the embodiment of the commission as a whole what do you mean by that pastor I mean making disciples must include the whole process of kingdom work that we've been called to that includes proclamation of the gospel includes that doesn't it I mean how could we start anywhere else but there with great commission work I mean we proclaim the good news of Jesus Christ that's where it begins then comes baptizing those who believe and trust Christ as their Lord and Savior we must do that right and what privilege that is to do to baptize them when they believe Acts 2:41 says then those who gladly received His that's Peter's word and what was that word the gospel when they gladly received

His word what happened to them they were baptized so it includes that doesn't it so we've got to proclaim preach teach herald the good news of Jesus Christ and then baptize those who believe and after that comes teaching by the way this is the hardest part and by the way this is the part that we fail at more often than not and this is why I say that the great commission is to make disciples not just decisions because we don't want to drop the ball after they believe they trust Christ as Lord and Savior and they're baptized scripturally as the Bible commands us and then if we stop there then we've failed we've not obeyed the great commission because it involves teaching teaching this is discipleship and this is what

[35:58] Jesus said teaching them that is those who are saved and baptized teaching them to be obedient growing active responsible sharing serving members of the church that's included in all of that is included in this imperative to make disciples so the great commission the rule not the exception with power not program for glory not growth about a person not a plan it's global not just local and it is to make disciples not decisions and then one more the great commission is go not come it's go not come that's why our theme this month and ongoing and our great commission work is the word go it's go it's go not come you might remember the famous line from the movie field of dreams and even if you haven't seen that movie you'll remember this line if you build it they will come now that might work for baseball might work for other sports football and such might work for walmart usually does they build one people go and that might work for places of entertainment and such you know

I guarantee you if they built you know six flags over oklahoma down here in oklahoma city or someplace people would go I'd go you build it the people will go will come but that will not work for the great commission that will not work that is in the sense of our obedience to the great commission putting up a sign out here on Washington Boulevard maybe we could get even a bigger sign put a bigger one more up to date one maybe even have a little you know kind of electronic thing there where we could put you know things on there about our ministries and cute little quips religious quips and such maybe even some video on there gotta look into that or an attractive building like I believe we have

God's blessed to give it to us great location could be a better location than the one right here right here on this hill these things are great aren't they and they may support great commission work but they are not in themselves great commission work newspaper tv you know radio advertisements and such flyers and mail outs and those kind of things are good things to do they're important tools but do not constitute great commission work special events we could hold here at the church big gospel scene we could you know just name one of your favorite southern gospel groups today who would it be we have any gospel southern gospel lovers in here who would it be well there's some

good ones out there

I think you can tell I'm not a southern gospel kind of guy I like some of it it's done real well we could get the top name bring them in here on a Saturday night or Friday night or hey how about Sunday Sunday night we pack this place out special events music events even our own in house musical programs which are always very good and so forth and nothing wrong with these things in and of themselves and they certainly do give us opportunities for great commission work right I think they do and for most of these things I am for them and more we need to do these things and more but we shall never never be a great commission church until we are actively going going going to where the lost and unchurched live and that's not easy to do is it we do just a little survey raise your hand if you live on state street one actually two how about

Avondale Avenue got one wonderful Queenstown Avenue don't see a hand there Waverly Avenue how about Greystone Avenue none there Wilshire Avenue raise your hand Wilshire Avenue Elmhurst right back here Kentucky Kentucky Street yep two back there Bonnie Lee Lane how about Fenway Place got a few from some of these streets you know there are a whole lot of people who live on these streets bunch

[42 : 35] I've just named a few a lot of people represent a lot of families and kids and so forth and I know you know the geography here these streets are right in the shadow of our church right out here aren't they and though we've been here a long time I don't know how long decades and though our church building is perhaps more visible than any other church in this community with few exceptions most the vast majority of the people live on these streets are not going to any church in this community and they're not coming to this church they're not coming here except for a few wonderful exceptions we're thankful for those the vast majority are not coming here and guess what they will not come until we go right they will not come until we go and the great commission is go not come

Thank you.