

XLII. Timeless Truth for Timely Topics in Biblical Perspective

What Does the Bible Say?

“The Great Commission and Five Apostolic Strategies”

Selected Texts

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July 17, 2016 – Evening sermon

I want to start by looking at Matthew 28 before we get into the five apostolic strategies to fulfill the Great Commission. Some of this you will have probably heard before but I want to give it for a number of reasons. One is that it is very clear you are observing a couple of things in our nation and one of them is the unraveling of our nation. We see on the news in our nation things that we thought would only happen in other nations that were just devoid of any Gospel witness. We see the one thing that is supposed to be supreme in our nation and that is law that is being set aside. So lawlessness is increasingly abounding. We are also in a nation that cannot deal with the fact that men and women are born sinners and they do evil because they are sinful. They will do absolute evil if God's grace does not either redeem them or restrain them. We call that special grace when sinners are saved and transformed. We call it common grace from God when those who are not yet saved but yet are restrained from doing all the evil they would do and even embrace good things.

Our nation has now not seen the necessity of either one of those yet our early forefathers understood it. That's why one bill of rights amendment that required the least time of debate in the constitutional congress was the first amendment on the free practice of religion. They all knew that was the reason they declared independence and that freedom unless governed by truth and maintained by the free practice of religion would not long stand in a society because no nation will be a nation as the law as king unless a morality is introduced to that nation through redeeming grace and common grace. Now we see a nation turning away from honoring that first amendment and that has a Biblically illiterate and spiritually impotent church.

I think there are many reasons why the church in America has become Biblically illiterate and spiritually impotent. I think one reason is in our understandable fascination with numerical church growth we set aside Gospel health in the church and therefore when the numbers became the objective many times the methods would become counterproductive to the message or the message would be compromised to get the numbers. We want to see people come to Christ and they can't come to Christ unless the message is clear. It is that we are sinners and in need of a Savior. We can't save ourselves. Christianity is not simply a place to go to hang your hat for an hour on Sunday to get a pick-me-up talk. In fact, Christianity is a living, personal, vital, robust relationship with the God of Glory through His Son Jesus Christ in the power of His Spirit. I think we have lost that message as the evangelical church in America. Because of that we are no longer providing the salt and the light.

Do you remember a time when you were growing up and you were told this country was a melting pot? We are about to see the upcoming Olympics and as you see all the people represented from around the world you actually reside in the one nation that probably has all the blood lines represented at the Olympics here in this nation. I believe there will be 140 nations represented but now they reside in this country as hyphenated Americans instead of Americans. The reason for this is because the virtues and values that have made this country unique are no longer proclaimed so you are watching the balkanization as well as the lawlessness of a nation.

In other words, there is no heat in the pot so nothing is melting. It is not a melting pot anymore but it is now a smorgasbord, a salad bar.

Why should that bother me if I love Jesus, the King of Kings and the Kingdom of God? If it's not happening here it's happening in other nations and I'm glad for that. I labor for that. I'm overwhelmed at all that the ministries here at Briarwood have done for the Kingdom and I'm committed to that but I do believe our commitment to world evangelism and world missions is rendered suspect if it is not matched by a prioritized commitment to our own nation.

The Reformers looked at it that way as well. Take John Calvin, how much more stellar of a Reformer can you get than him? It's no accident that this Calvin who sent people all over the world may even have sent missionaries to Brazil. My son in law left today going to Brazil and will land within miles of the team Calvin sent to Brazil in the 1500s. Calvin had a heart for the world but he sent 1300 missionaries to France because he had a heart for his own nation. He made many trips at the threat of the loss of his own life to that nation for the sake of the Gospel. A whole denomination was birthed because of his passion. It is called the French Huguenot denomination.

John Knox is the one who studied under John Calvin off and on for five years. Knox ended up back in Scotland. The man would be a father to a church that would send people all over the world. Knox said 'give me Scotland or I die.' When he arrived in Scotland he arrived alongside of other great Reformers like Hugh Latimer, Nicholas Ridley and Thomas Cranmer. Ridley and Latimer said when they were burned to death, 'we are lighting a candle for England in the name of Christ that shall never be put out.' I believe it is that passion that we ought to have for our own country, not to the diminishing of world missions but to demonstrate the integrity of world missions. We want the nations and we have a heart for our own nation to come to Christ.

In our nation because of our lack of engagement, our lack of Biblical literacy and spiritual power we have a nation where the world and life view no longer reflects the tenants of a Christian world and life view. I'm not arguing for a second amendment argument here but when we see violence we immediately go to the instrument of violence and we even name the violence – gun violence. It's not gun violence but people violence. It is coming from the hearts of men and women. I don't want to get into that debate but we have to have a clear understanding that the heart of the problem is the problem with the heart and that there is such a thing as evil. We reside in a nation that will not recognize evil but will call what is good evil and what is evil good. I believe that reveals our impotency. When the world talks and acts like the world it should not amaze us, because it always will, if the salt and light of the Kingdom is not present through the testimony of the body of Christ.

As you look back on church history how were nations claimed? As you look at the Bible how were nations claimed? I want to outline this for you and my overview statement is until Jesus takes me home, my heart is a world-shaking Kingdom of God. I love Acts 17:6b which says *[6b] some of the brothers before the city authorities, shouting, "These men who have turned the world upside down have come here also."* God says 'I will shake the nations with a Kingdom that cannot be shaken.' What is this Kingdom that cannot be shaken that shakes the kingdoms of this world and turns them upside down?

The world shaking Kingdom of God is a God-glorifying, Christ-centered, Spirit-filled, Word-shaped, prayer-ignited movement of the Gospel in Word and deed. Note, that while the Kingdom of God has the preeminence of Christ, it does not eclipse the doctrine of the Trinity. God the Father is glorified through the preeminence of Christ in the power of a Spirit-filled

people. We are Trinitarian. Our Gospel is Trinitarian. It is the work of the Trinity to save us. I have a theory on this. Almost all of the hymns that last are the hymns that are well written, can be sung by the congregation and thirdly, almost all of them are Trinitarian. The Bible shapes our thinking and with our thinking, our hearts and with our hearts, our lives. It only comes in and through prayer.

It is a movement of the Gospel in Word and deed. That's why when the Great Commission is done it will always be accompanied by the Great Commandment which is we will love the Lord with all our heart, soul and mind and we will love our neighbors as ourselves. This is not just our brothers and sisters in Christ. When people lose their lives and families are sitting there destroyed we weep with those who weep. When we see injustice we speak to it. When we are called for mercy and grace we bring it. What if they are not Christians? Then all the more we bring it. We are those who cannot pass those who are laying in anguish beside the road. We have to be the Samaritan because we love our neighbor and we love them even as we would be loved having been led with the love of God with all of our heart, soul, strength and mind. So with that basic statement, how did the Apostles do this? Let's look in Matthew 28.

Matthew 28:16–17 says *[16] Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them. [17] And when they saw him they worshiped him, but some doubted.* The end product of discipleship is worship and that is when you know you've hit a homerun. When people who once fell short of the glory of God now love to give glory to God, they worship Him. Matthew 28:18–20 says *[18] And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. [19] 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, [20] teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age."*

This is impossible to do what the Lord has told us here but what is impossible with us is possible with God and if God commands it God will resource it. The resource God sends to us, to accomplish this, is the powerful presence of the Spirit of God, and that is the Great Commission given to us. How was this worked out? I want to show you this through a couple of passages of Scripture. So when the Disciples get the Great Commission and Jesus ascends, what is the first thing they do? Let's look at Acts 1.

Acts 1:6–8 says *[6] So when they had come together, they asked him, "Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?" [7] He said to them, "It is not for you to know times or seasons that the Father has fixed by his own authority. [8] But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth."* So as they go to the nations Jesus says He will be with them by His Spirit who He sends to them and He will resource them. When the Spirit comes they will get two blessings. One is power and the other is directions.

When I fill you with My Spirit the evidence of My Spirit will be your witness of Me to this world. They will go to Jerusalem which we see in Acts chapters 1 through 8. They will go to Judea and Samaria and we see that in Acts chapters 9 through 12. They will go to the whole world and we see that in Acts 13 through the following. When they go to Jerusalem the first thing that happens is they seek the power of the Spirit.

Acts 1:12–14 says *[12] Then they returned to Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet, which is near Jerusalem, a Sabbath day's journey away. [13] And when they had entered, they went up to the upper room, where they were staying, 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. [14] All these with one accord were devoting themselves to prayer, together with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and his brothers. Now the eleven are expanding. In fact a little further on we are told that there are 120 now gathered in that Upper Room. They now select Mathias to replace Judas and then the Spirit of God falls upon them. Then they go out and the first thing they do is preach the Gospel to everyone.

Acts 2:14 says [14] *But Peter, standing with the eleven, lifted up his voice and addressed them: "Men of Judea and all who dwell in Jerusalem, let this be known to you, and give ear to my words."* So they engage in the foolishness of preaching as they take the Gospel to the streets. What happens? In this next passage are 3,000 and I'm convinced it is just counting the heads of households so there are probably about 7,000 to 9,000 gathered in on this day.

Acts 2:42–47 says [42] *And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. [43] And awe came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles. [44] And all who believed were together and had all things in common. [45] And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need. [46] And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts, [47] praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved.*

There are five elements to the Apostolic strategy to fulfill the Great Commission and to shake the world, beginning with our own nation, even as the Apostles did in Jerusalem and beyond. The first element is insistent, intercessory prayer. We need Biblical wisdom. How do you get it? You get in the Word and then you get the Teacher. You get the Giver of the Word to be your Teacher of the Word. Then you get the one whom the Spirit of God has given to preach the Word. You get into the Word with insistent, intercessory prayer. If you want to see how God ignited the revival in Bristol just read the biography of George Mueller and see what God did there. How did this revival in Acts 2 get birthed? It was birthed in a prayer meeting. Then it was brought forth in a sermon. It is through prayer and the Word. I'm not saying anything new for this has been the legacy of this congregation for almost 60 years. I'm grateful for how it continues to multiply and what is being done. We want to see it that much more because we're encouraged by it.

One of the pastors of our congregational communities was telling me the other day about all the prayer meetings that have been started in their community. He is in one of the younger communities. There are small groups meeting all over this area. Dr. Barker and his wife Barbara still have the prayer groups they started many years ago and it has given birth to many others since. It needs to happen consistently and insistently time and time again. Revivals come from prayer. It is just that simple but yet that profound. We tend to think revivals come from programs and I'm not opposed to programs but revivals come from the presence of the Holy Spirit at the proclamation of His Word through His people and therefore we need to seek Him.

One of my models for life is a man named John L. Girardeau who pastored in the 19th century. He was raised on a plantation and his father was a plantation owner with slaves. John grew up looking at the slaves and his heart was overwhelmed for them. In 1856 he was the greatest preacher in America. Nobody could touch because God had really gifted him. He was given offers in Atlanta, New York, New Orleans and everywhere but he would not leave low country because of his love for the African and chattel slavery overwhelmed him. So the Second Presbyterian Church in Charleston, South Carolina commissioned him to go and start a church.

He started the church through a prayer meeting. They would gather sing and pray, sing and pray. He was the first pastor to ordain African American elders in the Presbyterian Church. They would look to him and say 'is it time for you to preach?' He would say 'not yet, keep praying.' One day he finally said after they asked if it was time for him to preach, 'the day has come' and he began to preach. A revival swept Charleston.

In those days the black congregation would normally sit in the balcony and the white congregation would sit on the main level. This wasn't the case at John's church, Mount Zion Presbyterian Church for the black congregation sat on the main level and the white people that attended sat upstairs and it was overflowing. All the white parishioners were coming on Sunday nights and Wednesday nights. A revival broke out that through the shipping lanes went to New Orleans and New York. It all began with concentrated, intercessory prayer.

The second element of Apostolic ministry is a commitment to personal evangelism and small group discipleship. Did you notice, almost the throwaway line at the end of Acts 2? There are 3,000 that come to Christ and we get all excited and rightly so. That is just counting the men so this is probably looking at households but look at that last phrase. Acts 2:47b says *And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved*. It wasn't just mass evangelism but it was personal evangelism. I am all for mass evangelism events because I think they have great significant value but I believe we're making a big mistake when we think the way we're going to shake the nation is by gathered evangelism.

In fact, most of us think of a worship service, not in terms of worship, but as an evangelistic instrument. There will never be a gathering of this congregation in which one, the Gospel will not be clear, two the Gospel will be present and three people will be invited to give their life to Christ, but I do not believe that will shake the nation. I believe it is when people evangelize when they scatter from the gathering that the nation and cities will be shaken. So when you finish reading this study who are the 2, 3, 4 or 5 people that with insistent prayer God has put on your heart to find a way to tell them about Jesus Christ? Personal evangelism and the follow up with personal discipleship, and small groups gathered day by day in the Word and prayer is what will shake this nation.

I want to show you support about the church scattered. Let's look in the Bible where the church is now being persecuted in Acts 7. Stephen is stoned in Acts 7. Stephen cries to the Lord to forgive them and standing next to him is a man named Saul who will become the leading religious terrorist. Now let's look what happens in Acts 8. Acts 8:1 says *[1] And Saul approved of his (Stephen's) execution. And there arose on that day a great persecution against the church in Jerusalem, and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles*. God had a program and it was persecution. These people think they were going to stop the church in Jerusalem but all they are doing is spreading the church to Judea and Samaria. Why? It is because the believers are being scattered. So what happens when they are scattered?

Acts 8:4 says *[4] Now those who were scattered went about preaching the word*. All kinds of members of the church were scattered except the Apostles. The leaders are still back at Jerusalem and they are keeping the church going. The believers were the ones that were scattered and when they were scattered they went to Judea and Samaria and started preaching the Gospel. They didn't go die in a pile and throw pity parties. The church at Antioch comes out this scattering. All kinds of things are happening everywhere as believers get scattered. Judea and Samaria are now being shaken by the Gospel. This is the church scattered. It is personal evangelism and small group discipleship.

The third element of Apostolic ministry is leadership multiplication and mobilization. The church should become a leadership factory not only for leaders in the church but leaders in the church and from the church into the world. We have to give ourselves to the development and apprenticeship of the next generation of pastors and leaders to go into every sphere of the culture. It is no accident that everywhere Paul goes he picks up someone and trains them. When Paul died we see all these leaders he has produced – Timothy, Silas, Aquila and Priscilla. There are the leading women that he has trained as well. They weren't apostles, elders or preachers but they were leading women that were right alongside of them. They were bringing leadership forward as well.

The church not only had leaders in the church but from the church into the community, making a difference like Lydia. She was a leading business woman in the community that probably helped with getting the church planted in Thyatira. God uses leaders and the church is a pipeline for this. God used a Knox who brought a Chris Goodman alongside of him. Time and time again God uses a leader and then another leader and then these two leaders (one who has mentored another) produce all kinds of leaders that go everywhere around the world. So there is an intentional commitment in the work of the Great Commission to develop and deploy leaders to multiply and mobilize leaders as they are sent out into the world for Christ. These are men and women who are gifted to make an impact in their neighborhood, business, industry and every place they go. We need thermostat leaders, not thermometer leaders who reflect the temperature of the culture, but leaders that set the temperature in the culture. That is what we have been called to develop and send out into the world.

The fourth element in Apostolic ministry of the Great Commission is church planting and church revitalization. They planted churches in Jerusalem, Antioch, Ephesus, Philippi, Berea, Thessalonica, Athens, Corinth, etc. They planted churches all over. Did you hear the increase of the numbers of conversions? The key to that was the increase in the number of church plants. We have to be about church planting and intentionally helping churches maintain Gospel health through church revitalization. The Apostle Paul went intentionally out in the world in order to bring the Gospel through evangelism and discipleship. Then he planted a church. On his second missionary journey he did the same thing except he went back to strengthen the churches he had planted before – church revitalization.

I believe the vast majority of our resources of our people and our finances ought to be given to church planting and church revitalization. That does not mean I don't think there are place for various para church ministries. I love that Campus Outreach is now asking their graduates when they graduate to go help out with a church plant for at least a year or two afterwards. That's a student ministry that is not only flowing out of a church but that is a student ministry that is there to propagate, perpetuate, celebrate and multiply churches. This kind of thinking needs to be put in place.

Samuel Davies did this as well. He would go to place like Virginia to set up preaching points and prayer meetings to pray and preach and after people were converted he went to get someone who knew how to pastor to take over and he would go and do this all over again somewhere else. He planted the church. He brought people to Christ. He disciplined them and then the church would nurture them and would continue to mature it.

The fifth element of Apostolic ministry is intentional focus upon the cities in general and capitals/centers of power and influence in particular. County seats, state capitals, national capitals, media centers – are all places we need to focus on. I am not saying to forget about the rural places. I am saying let's do what you did with me. In 1983 you sent me to what is now

either the number one or number two financial center of the United States – Charlotte, North Carolina – to plant a church where we didn't have a PCA church. God was gracious to bless and now there is not only that church but two full Presbyteries in the metro Charlotte area. I'm not saying you leave the little places aside, but you go to the hub and then you put the spokes out. I believe that is what Jesus did.

Let's look at Matthew 9. Jesus has a three year itinerate ministry. He focuses on multiplying and mobilizing leaders and He takes the Gospel for evangelism and discipleship. How does He do it? Matthew 9:35–38 says [35] *And Jesus went throughout all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom and healing every disease and every affliction.* [36] *When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.* [37] *Then he said to his disciples, "The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; [38] therefore pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest."*

When we send out laborers they should follow Jesus. What did Jesus do? He went to the cities and villages. Will that overflow into the rural areas? Absolutely, but He went where the people were and He went to bring the Gospel to the cities in general. I believe He went to capitals in particular. I want to show you a Scripture that I think supports that thought as well. Let's look at Luke 8.

Luke 8:1a says [1a] *Soon afterward he (Jesus) went on through cities and villages, proclaiming and bringing the good news of the kingdom of God.* He went to the cities, towns, villages and then He gives a Great Commission. I want you to think about the Great Commission perhaps a little differently. Take the Gospel to Jerusalem. Jerusalem was the capital of the Jewish people. Take the Gospel to Judea. Take the Gospel to Samaria which was the capital of Judea. Then take the Gospel to the world.

You can find 28 places where the Apostle Paul went, villages and towns that are named and 22 of them were capitals. He went to Athens, Corinth, Philippi, Ephesus and Ephesus spilled off all kinds of churches in places like Thyatira, Laodicea, Hierapolis, but he went right there where that power of Roman military might was in Rome. He went to the capital where intellectual thinking was – Athens – and as he is giving his life he goes to Rome, right to the seat of the capital. He brings the power of the Gospel to the power centers of the world – to the down and outers, to the up and inners. He spreads the seed all over the field but strategically he goes after where the people are. When he is there they bless the seed with the Gospel in Word and deed and therefore they bring the testimony of the Gospel that's there, not only with the ministry of preaching but diaconal ministry and other ministries. You can begin to see what the Lord is doing and then that Gospel goes from place to place to place.

I want you to pray and think about this. I thank God for the two churches we are planting in Detroit. I thank the Lord that the church we helped plant in downtown Charleston is becoming a strong church. I thank the Lord for the cities that are on our horizon for our National Mission's Conference Committee. I thank the Lord for our World Mission's Committee that is looking at the cities of the world. I have been getting text from a dear brother in the Lord who is in India about the darkness and despair. We have a little church where he is at that has about 40 people in it but they are reaching, preaching and teaching. Don't despise the day of small things.

I believe there were the five strategies/elements that were used by the Apostles. Sometimes God will ignite to 3,000, 5,000 and to whole nations but most of the time it is through the persistence to the Apostolic strategy, Apostolic message and the Christ-given commission that nations are shaken by the power of the Gospel of the Kingdom. Let's pray.

Prayer:

Father, I thank you for the time we could study this crucial issue. Lord, I wish more people could hear this message but I pray for my elders and pastors that somehow in a better way than I have done, they will be able to take it to our congregational communities and to our small groups. I pray they will be able to distill this Apostolic strategy and will be able to lead that we as a church from top to bottom, from east to west, from north to south, from center to circumference will embrace the Great Commission and the Apostolic strategy. God, I pray that we will bring by Your grace the powerful Gospel witness of the Kingdom to this nation. Please O God, cause the Gospel to break out again for I pray in Jesus' Name, Amen.

Power Point

An Overview with Highlights

The world-shaking Kingdom of God is a God-glorifying, Christ-centered, Spirit-filled, Word-shaped, prayer-ignited movement of the Gospel in word and deed.

Life Takeaway

Five Apostolic Strategic Commitments

1. Insistent Intercessory Prayer
2. Personal Evangelism and Small Group Discipleship
3. Leadership Multiplication and Mobilization
4. Church Planting and Revitalization
5. Intentional Focus upon the Cities in General and the Capitals in Particular