

2023 In Biblical Perspective
“A Great Commitment to the Great Commission and the Great Commandment”
Matthew 22:34–40; 28:16–20
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January 8, 2023 • Sunday Morning Sermon

This is our day for great so we will be looking at Matthew 28 which is the Great Commission and Matthew 22 which is the Great Commandment. We will start by looking at Matthew 28 which is gloriously important for us. Matthew 28:16-20 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. [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.”*

Matthew 22:34-40 says *[34] But when the Pharisees heard that He had silenced the Sadducees, they gathered together. [35] And one of them, a lawyer, asked Him a question to test Him. [36] “Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?” [37] And He said to him, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. [38] This is the great and first commandment. [39] And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. [40] On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets.”*

The grass withers, the flower fades, God’s Word abides forever and by His grace and mercy His Word be preached for you.

I will also be referring to a number of other texts of Scripture as we come to the Lord’s Supper. The Scripture says that as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup which tells us to bring focus to it yet it doesn’t tell us how often. We have communion seasons here at Briarwood where we come to the Table about 10 to 12 times a year where the entire week is focused on coming to the Lord’s Table. I am approaching it in this way due to our ministry theme in this coming year – Project Andrew, bring them to Him.

The first church planted after the ascension of Jesus in the New Testament is clearly the church in Jerusalem. It becomes a pattern church for us and not because of its numerical size but because of the dynamics, commitments, and patterns of that church. In that church we see two things readily. One is God’s church is fed by two gifts He has given to us from heaven and that is the Word of God and the Spirit of God. Then secondly, God has given us means whereby the Word of God and His Spirit bring us to Christ, mature us in Christ and grow us in Christ. He has given this to us in a number of ways that God has designed but I like the way it’s given to us in Acts 2.

Think about this. The church in Jerusalem was conceived in a prayer meeting of 120 as we see in Acts 1. Then it was birthed in preaching of the Word which we see in Acts 2. So, they pray and then preach the Word as God then brings in 3,000 more which is probably only counting the men. Then the Scripture tells us the Lord added to their number every day. The 3,000 added certainly grabs our attention but think about how every day God’s Word and God’s Spirit through God’s church were bringing people to Christ daily.

How were these people being discipled, for that was their mission – to go and make disciples. Jesus told them they couldn’t do this unless He was with them and He said He would

be with them by His Spirit so they were to wait for His Spirit and then with power, they would His witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria and the uttermost part of the world. So how did they mature God's people? It was by His Spirit and the Word and it says in Acts 2:42, [42] *And they devoted themselves to the **apostles' teaching** and the **fellowship**, to the **breaking of bread** and the **prayers**.* This was continual and intentional. They devoted themselves to those four things. Think of it this way; the ministry of the Word proclaimed (the apostles' teaching), the ministry of the Word shared (fellowship – not like the world that sows seeds of discord but sowing seeds of accord, speaking the truth in love), the ministry of the Word displayed (through communion) and the ministry of prayer.

When the Apostle Paul speaks of preaching the Word, he sums up like this in I Corinthians 2:2 which says [2] *For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified.* In other words, are there monumental moments in the life of Christ? Yes, for one the virgin conception and birth, and there is the cross, the empty tomb, the resurrection, the ascension and the second coming. What's interesting to me when those key moments in the life and ministry of Christ are highlighted which are all crucial, the one that becomes the focal point is the cross. Without the virgin birth there couldn't have been the atoning death for God had to come in the flesh. If there had not been a resurrection to affirm the triumph of the atoning death then we would just consider this One a misguided person that made claims and died. But no, for all of those are crucial but it's the cross that Paul says we focus on, why? It is because, it is there that the love of God meets the holiness of God so that sinners can be saved by the grace of God to the glory of God.

God is just for it says in Romans 1:18, [18] *For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth.* As we come to the Table today, I will be thinking about the wrath of God against all of my sins has been displayed at the cross where Jesus bore it for us and we now have this glorious message of salvation through the Son of God through the atonement of God. That is the focal point.

Interestingly, what is the theology of baptism? It is the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus. We have two sacraments that Jesus has left us – baptism and the Lord's Supper. What is the theology of the Lord's Supper? It is the body and blood. Praise God for the manger, the empty tomb, the crown, the Second Coming, but all my hope and plea was the shedding of the blood of Jesus for me. That is where He brings us to, a fixed point. So whether it's the preaching of the Word – Christ and Him crucified – or the fellowship where we encourage one another as those forgiven with truth and love or the Word shared, or the Word displayed in the sacraments, we are brought back to that fixed point of who Christ is and what He has done. It had to be Jesus on that cross for nobody else could atone, but He had to give an atonement because the blood of bulls and goats can't save us – they're only telling us we need a substitute and that the wages of sin is death (Romans 6:23).

We come to that glorious last part and that is our need of prayers. They gave themselves to the apostles teaching – the Word proclaimed, the fellowship – the Word shared, and to the breaking of *the* bread – this don't mean hospitality meals. That definite article is taking us to the Lord's Supper which is the breaking of the bread. And then they gloriously devoted themselves to the prayers – personal prayers, family prayers, worship prayers, petition prayers, praise prayers, intercessory prayers, supplication prayers, and all kinds of praying is what God's people were doing. That's how He displays the church and that's how He profiles this church for us, and one of the things that we do is practice the Lord's Supper, often, with focus. We

don't just tack it on to the end of a service and we don't ignore, only doing it maybe once a year, but bringing it often, yet bringing it with focus.

When we do this what are we saying? We are saying a number of things. What has God designed this supper to do for us? I want to suggest three things here. God has designed the Lord's Supper for our renewal. It's revival time. The Lord's Supper is revival time. It is a means that God has designed and appointed to revive our souls with three things. Number one, it gives us a time for repentance, as the Table says to examine ourselves. When we talk about the body and blood of Jesus, are we saved by what we do or by what He did? We're saved by His work. Someone says to me 'Do you believe in salvation by work?' My response is 'sure, it's just not my works, it's the work of Jesus – the work that Jesus did for me on the cross and the work that Jesus is doing in me from heaven through the Spirit and His Word.' I praise God for that for my hope and plea is only in the body and blood of Christ.

If that's true, that I am saved by what He did, then that gives me the freedom to be able to examine what I'm doing, confess and repent of sin in my life – repentance. The Lord's Supper gives us an opportunity to remove those things in our life that are breaking our intimacy. Now, Jesus loves you. You don't have to be perfect for Jesus to keep loving you. You are perfected in Christ, but our sins can break fellowship with the Lord. So, coming to this Table gives us a time to clear accounts for us. Now, you don't have to wait until the Lord's Supper to repent. It's just a stark call from the Lord. I want to remind you that you are saved at the cross, not by what you did. Therefore, you're now free to be honest with what we did right – praise God from whom all blessings flow, and what we did wrong – Lord, I confess and I repent.

The second blessing of renewal is we also examine our relationships in the body of Christ – reconciliation. You must discern the body and blood of the Lord, the text says and that's why the Table calls us to make right relationships in the Lord of forgiveness. That is something the world cannot do; the world cannot forgive. But we can readily do so. We can readily do so when someone repents and we've already done so in our heart, even as the Lord is forgiven us.

The third blessing of renewal, as I stick to words beginning with the letter 'r' is, recalibration – this gets us back to the fixed point. As Christians, particularly those who are serious in their walk with the Lord, it is so easy to get discouraged, isn't it? And it is because we are not where we want to be. The Bible tells us we are where God has us in the blood and righteousness of Jesus. Now you're free to say, 'Lord, I'm not where I want to be, but I praise God, I'm not where I was' – saved by the grace of the Lord Jesus. When we recalibrate we can get our confidence and assurance back where it belongs – not on how we're doing, but on what He did for us. So, as we come to the Table we repent, reconcile and recalibrate and this could be said that we get back to the basics.

That's why I'm glad we're doing this at the first of the year. The winds of war, culture wars, spiritual wars, all kind of wars are all around us. They're swirling. What do you do in moments like this? Our tendency is to think, 'well, as a Christian or as a church, we've got to come up with some ingenious program or we have to have some kind of a quasi messiah. It's a personality. It's a program. It's our ingenuity. It's our sophistication.' I would say 'no' for it's our recalibration back to the basics and I think the Lord's Supper is a wonderful time for us to do that. What are the basics for me as a Christian? What are the basics for us as a church? What does it mean to get back to the basics, to be recalibrated in terms of what the Lord is doing in our life?

It's very clear to me that when Jesus was resurrected, He called the first General Assembly of the church. The first General Assembly of the church was not in Acts 15, it was in Matthew 28. The church wasn't very big for there were only 11 and He called them together and prior to His ascension, when they saw Him, the product of His discipleship was seen for they worshiped Him, even with their doubts. Then He said to them, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth, go therefore and make disciples" (Matthew 28:18-19). There's your command. This is what you do, church. Our job is not to reclaim the culture of the 1950s and 1960s. Our job is not to transform the culture. Our job is not cultural reclamation or transformation – if it becomes that we'll either get culturally isolated or culturally accommodated. Our job is sinner transformation. The product is cultural transformation, the blessed consequence.

Jesus said this until the end of the age that He would be with us to make disciples and that's our mission. Jesus gives us the Holy Spirit, so that as His church we can be on mission, to make disciples. That's our business and what we're here for. God has a job for family, the institution of creation. God has a job for government, the institution of the fall to retard and restraint sin. God has a job for His church in light of redemption and that is to make disciples until the day of the consummation. That is what we are called to do, is to be on that mission of the Great Commission. What is our message? Our message is the Gospel of Christ wrapped in the whole counsel of God. We preach and teach. That's why I have been committed my entire life moving now toward the 50th year of expository preaching because I believe the job is to preach and teach the whole counsel of God. Pastor/teachers are called to equip the saints with the ministry of the Word and that is expository preaching.

I thank God for every 30 plus congregational communities in this church have Bible teaching in them and small groups that have Bible teaching in them as this cascade of discipleship starts at a pulpit, moves to the lectern, goes to the small group, and then comes into your own personal or family life – the Word and the Spirit at work in your life with the gospel contoured, the gospel centered, the gospel circumference, whole Council of God. It takes the whole Bible to make a whole Christian. So, we are going to be committed to that message – on mission and on message, teaching them to observe all that Jesus has commanded us and He will be with us even to the end of the age.

That's why Paul in Acts 20:26-27 said to the church at Ephesus when he left them after three years, "I'm innocent of your blood because I taught you the whole counsel of God" or as Philippians 2:16 says, holding forth the word of life. Our mission is to make disciples and our message is a Gospel-wrapped declaration of God's whole counsel, His Word. All 66 books of the Bible are inspired and profitable for reproof, correction and training in righteousness that the man of God may be disciplined, adequate and equipped for every good work (II Timothy 3:16-17).

Thirdly, we need to be in ministry. There are four basic ministries for your personal life, your family life, and for this church and they are right there in the Great Commission. The first ministry we have is the ministry of outreach to the world – it's called evangelism. The Great Commission tells us to 'go' and it really should be translated 'as you are going' make disciples. The day of the receptor church that grows by opening the doors is gone. There are no cultural pressures to go to church. Now we have to make up your mind – are you going to bring people through the doors for entertainment? Are we going to bring people through the doors for a promise of success in life? Or are we going to bring people through the doors to hear Jesus say, 'I will save you from your sins'? They're not going to knock down the door. When we scatter,

we have to go to them. Once you're saved, you're no longer a mission field for you're now a missionary and that's what God has called us to do – go seek and save the lost.

The second ministry we have to do, after evangelism, is the ministry of enfolding into the body of Christ. I love what Paul says about the church for he calls it the fellowship. I know many of you have watched or read *The Lord of the Rings*; *The Fellowship of the Ring*. Praise the Lord it's an interesting movie and book but we're the Fellowship of Christ. We're not the only fellowship of Christ, but we belong to the fellowship of Christ. So, when people come to Christ, they are enfolded – baptized in the name of the Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit, and the believer and their households were enfolded into the body of Christ. Then what do we do?

The third ministry we have to do is equipping – teaching them to observe all He has commanded us. In this Matthew 28 text we see these participles – they're going, baptizing, teaching and then we start equipping them with the Word of God. That's the small group discipleship and life of life stuff that we do. It's initiated from a pulpit, but it's carried into boots on the ground. Then what do we do?

The fourth ministry we do is exaltation. Success is exaltation. Here's the way I put it. I think there's one sanctified sport, and that's baseball – no other discussion on this, that's it. So, I'm going to use that illustration – to be on mission and on message we have to do the ministry and the ministry scores. When you get to first base, that's evangelism. When you get to second base, that's unfolding. When you get to third base, that's equipping and you know the job is being done when those who fell short of the glory of God, now has as their greatest delight to give glory to God and they worshipped Him. And that's what God has called us to do on mission, on message, in ministry, and the culture of the church is the Great Commandment.

The Great Commandment is where you love the Lord with all your heart, soul and mind, and you love those made in the image of the Lord as yourself. Just as you've known the love of God in your life, you want that love to be in their life, who are made in the image of God. What if they're Democrats or Republicans? What if they're old or young? What if their skin color is different? They're made in the image of God and headed to hell. Love them with the Gospel because you love the Lord with all your heart, soul and mind. In this polarized, fractious, divisive, angry society, we have to put something different in front of them. And it comes not through therapy, it comes through doxology – loving the Lord with all of our heart, soul and mind and then those who are made in His image as ourselves.

I think there'll be three marks – courage, compassion and civility. There is nothing greater than the love of God. [18a] *There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear* (1 John 4:18). We will be courageous no matter winds are swirling around us. Secondly, by God's grace we can be compassion, not angry – angry at sin, praise the Lord, but going after sinners with compassion. To the drunk – here's my home. To the sexually immoral – we sit down to talk. To those who would bring the deconstruction of an entire civilization – come, I want to reason with you. Always be ready to give an account of the hope that's within us (1 Peter 3:15). How do we give that account? We do it with gentleness, clarity, courage, compassion and that means civility. We say what we mean, mean what we say and we're never mean when we say it. That's what God has called us to be and to do.

The culture in the embassy of the Kingdom of God, His church, is at least a door opener to share the words of the Gospel to others. Recalibrate – a great commitment to the Great Commandment and the Great Commission on mission on message in ministry – ministries of evangelism to the world, enfolding to one another, equipping, and then exaltation – giving worship and praise to God. Out of our love to the Lord and loving those made in His image we

give courage, compassion and civility. I think that's the recalibration and it doesn't start with a program. It starts with our hearts and God's designed this Table to speak to our hearts.

I'll illustrate it this way; If you were the coach of the most elite basketball program in your day and time and you had your new team there for the new season, what would you do? I can tell you what John Wooden would do, and it's documented – the first week of practice, the first day of practice, the first words out of his mouth was to teach them how to put their socks on and how to lace up their shoes. He didn't go into drop steps, fakes or any of that. He said, "Here's how you put your socks on. Here's how you lace up your shoes. Here's how you walk on the court, properly, ready to play." Then he went to dribbling – 'Here's how you fingertip dribble.' Then he went to passing. Get the picture. He worked on the basics. He had the most elite team and successful in his era.

Or if you're as old as me you can remember I think, the unmatched dynasty of the Green Bay Packers under Vince Lombardi. He started his practice off by saying, "Gentlemen, this is a football." He knew they didn't get beat because of a lack of sophistication. You have to know how to block, tackle, pass, and rush. Those are the basics and that's what you have to do. Ted Williams used to write about how he loved to get to spring training because of all of the hundreds of swings he could take in the batting practice. He was the greatest hitter that's ever lived.

Or if you're going to go to war, what do you do? You take your soldiers and you put them in a boot camp under adversity and teach them basic training. How do you do the basics under adversity? How do you do them right? Or if you're arguably the greatest golfer that's ever lived – Jack Nicklaus, certainly a debate there, but every season, you start by going to your coach. Jack would go to his coach and say, "Mr. Grout, would you teach me how to play golf? Teach me the grip..." You get to the basics. Whether it's heroes and war or athletes in the field of adversity, those who are the most effective are those who do the basics right.

I believe one of the great basics in the Christian life, as we seek to make disciples and love the Lord with all our heart, soul in mind is personal evangelism. Every generation, every person, has to hear – you can't be saved without believing, you can't believe without hearing. You must hear it. One of my great heroes that I want to walk you through for the next three studies is Andrew. I'm calling it Project Andrew. So if you want to read ahead, you can read John 1, John 6 and John 12. We're going to look at what Andrew did as he would bring people to Jesus. He would bring people that would lead 3,000 to Jesus. He would bring people that could be used of Jesus to feed 5,000. He would bring people to Jesus where Jesus' eyes would light up and say, "Now My time has come." Project Andrew – can we be an Andrew?

I love the legacy here at Briarwood of world missions. I am utterly committed and amazed at this enormous sacrificial, faithful, generous giving that you did at the end of this past year. I praise God for that! In fact, I can't wait till they get to a couple of weeks and they can tell you the 11 nations that we now get to plant a church in because of that giving that we had on hold and now we're able to plant those churches. And every one of you who were called to be a cross-cultural missionary, we are going to get you there by God's grace. But every one of us are missionaries right here. Every one of us can bring them to Him by bringing Him to them. Let's pray that, that same generous sacrificial spirit that was manifested in your stewardship might be manifested in our evangelism, even as you thank God for your salvation at the Table. Pray this; "God this year, help me bring them to Him who was sent for me and may I bring them to Him who was sent for them." Let's pray.

Prayer:

Father, thank You for the moments we could be together in Your Word. Thank You, Jesus, for the way that You work in and through our lives in glorious and wonderful ways. Jesus, please speak to the hearts of Your people as they come to the Table. Prepare our hearts now as we come to Him who is worthy, who shed His blood because He gave His life in our place that we could have eternal life. Fill us with such a love of Jesus that we have a love for Jesus, that we want out of love to bring Jesus to them, that we might bring them to Him, even as we focus in these moments in personal repentance, reconciliation, and recalibration. Lord, turn our hearts to those who need Him. I pray in Jesus' Name, Amen.