

2024 NORTH AMERICAN MISSIONS EMPHASIS

Sermon Outline

Make Jesus Known

Theme Scripture Verse: Mark 16:15

All scriptures are CSB unless otherwise cited.

NOTE: Before the sermon, show one of the Week of Prayer for North American Missions missionary video segments or the theme video, “Make Jesus Known,” available at AnnieArmstrong.com/Resources.

We live in a day and time when it’s easy to get distracted. From the dawn of the Internet age, information has been speeding around us faster than we can keep up. Add to that the smart phone, and we are never far away from a world full of information. In fact, it’s literally in the palm of our hand. With so much to know, so much to see, and so much to learn, the list of things to do is unending. We are a culture of unceasing entertainment, endless activities, and limitless opportunities. If the question is, “What can we do?” the answer might be, “Whatever we want!”

But for the Christian and the church community, though we are in the world, we are not of the world. We have the same information advantages and technological advances, but don’t we have a different focus? Isn’t the question we should be asking not “What can we do?” but “What should we do?”

And in answering that question, God and His Word are absolutely clear.

In no less than 6 places in the Gospels and the book of Acts, Jesus’ “Great Commission” is recorded (Matthew 28:16-20, Mark 16:15-20, Luke 24:46-49, John 20:21-22, Acts 1:6-8, Acts 10:42-43). It’s referred to as “great” because it’s His very last command to His disciples before He ascends to His throne in Heaven, and as one author comments, “His last command should be our first command.” While we should heed every single command the Lord Jesus has given us, THIS command—to make Jesus known—holds a place of special priority. Because it is in this command that all the other commands find their context in the lives of men and women, boys and girls throughout the earth.

In each of these Great Commission Scripture passages, the details are a little different. Some opponents of Christianity want to point to this as a reason to not trust the veracity of the Bible. However, a much simpler explanation comes to us in Acts 1:1-5.

I wrote the first narrative, Theophilus, about all that Jesus began to do and teach until the day he was taken up, after he had given instructions through the Holy Spirit to the apostles he had chosen. After he had suffered, he also presented himself alive to them by many convincing proofs, appearing to them over a period of forty days and speaking about the kingdom of God. While he was with them, he commanded them not to leave Jerusalem, but to wait for the Father’s promise. “Which,” he said, “you have heard me speak about; for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit in a few days.”

What Luke gives us here is a very basic summary of the time, 40 days to be exact, between Jesus' resurrection and ascension. In it, he tells us 3 important truths. First, Jesus presented Himself alive from the dead by many proofs over and over again, sometimes for elongated periods of time. It wasn't just one person who claimed to have seen the resurrected Jesus. It wasn't just His closest disciples either. We're going to find 120 in the upper room just a few verses later. This couldn't have been a series of individual, short hallucinations. No, Jesus stayed with them. Second, He spoke to them about the Kingdom of God—a lot. He shared the same message repeatedly. And finally, He told them to wait for the Holy Spirit Who would give them power.

So, what we have in the Great Commission is not a single message shared a single time to a single audience that was written down by different authors in different ways. No, the Great Commission was the punch line, the primary application to the central message that Jesus shared again and again for 40 straight days. When Jesus was asked about the greatest commandment in all the law (Matt. 22:36-40), He said, "It all boils down to this" as He quoted from Deuteronomy 6:4. Similarly, after three years of leading, developing, and teaching these disciples, with the knowledge that His time on earth was drawing near, again He says, "It all boils down to this" as He delivers the Great Commission time and time again.

Again, with just a scanning of the texts, the reader recognizes that these accounts aren't carbon copies. And the discrepancies are easily seen as the differences in audience, context, and location. Yet, I believe we should be compelled to ask, aside from the differences, what do these 6 accounts hold in common?

Let's take a look:

Acts 1:6-8

So when they had come together, they asked him, "Lord, are you restoring the kingdom to Israel at this time?"

He said to them, "It is not for you to know times or periods that the Father has set by his own authority. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come on you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."

Matthew 28:16-20

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."

Luke 24:44-49

He told them, "These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you—that everything written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets, and the Psalms must be fulfilled." Then he opened their minds to understand the Scriptures. He also

said to them, “This is what is written: The Messiah will suffer and rise from the dead the third day, and repentance for forgiveness of sins will be proclaimed in his name to all the nations, beginning at Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things.

And look, I am sending you what my Father promised. As for you, stay in the city until you are empowered from on high.”

John 20:19–22

When it was evening on that first day of the week, the disciples were gathered together with the doors locked because they feared the Jews. Jesus came, stood among them, and said to them, “Peace be with you.”

Having said this, he showed them his hands and his side. So the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord.

Jesus said to them again, “Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, I also send you.” After saying this, he breathed on them and said, “Receive the Holy Spirit.”

Acts 10:42–44

“He commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that he is the one appointed by God to be the judge of the living and the dead. All the prophets testify about him that through his name everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins.” While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit came down on all those who heard the message.

Mark 16:14–17

Later he appeared to the Eleven themselves as they were reclining at the table. He rebuked their unbelief and hardness of heart, because they did not believe those who saw him after he had risen. Then he said to them, “Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation. Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned. And these signs will accompany those who believe: In my name they will drive out demons; they will speak in new tongues.”

In these different accounts we see themes, but what do all six accounts of the Great Commission have in common?

3 Elements: Proclamation, People, Power

1. Proclamation

In Acts 1, Jesus tells His disciples they will be His witnesses. In doing so, He uses the word “martus.” This word has a few aspects to its meaning. In its historical sense, it is a spectator at an event. In its legal sense, it is someone who gives a testimony. In an ethical sense, it is someone who proves the strength and genuineness of their faith by enduring suffering and even death as Christ did. After all, this is where we get the word “martyr.” Jesus is telling these disciples that very soon, God’s presence is going to break into the world, and when it does, He’s going to use them, their lives, their experience, and their testimony to change the world.

But how? Matthew 28 says through teaching obedience after bringing people into a new identity which requires proclamation. Luke 24 says to go as witnesses to proclaim repentance and forgiveness of sin. John 20 says that Jesus is sending His disciples just as the Father sent Him. How was Jesus sent? Jesus was sent proclaiming the good news. Acts 10 says that the disciples were commanded to preach and testify. And Mark 16 tells us that Jesus' central command was to proclaim the gospel.

In all of this, one truth is clear. If we are going to obey the Great Commission, the message of Christ must be proclaimed. The true story of Jesus' sinless life, substitutionary death, bodily resurrection, and impending return must be proclaimed!

The first call of the Great Commission is then, "Go as witnesses and make Christ known!"

2. People

Where and to whom should this gospel message be proclaimed? Acts 1 says Jerusalem, Judea and Samaria and the ends of the earth. Matthew 28 says "all nations." Luke 24 says all nations, beginning in Jerusalem. Acts 10 says all people. Mark 16 says to go to all the world and proclaim the gospel to all creation. But that leaves John 20. At a peripheral glance, it doesn't seem that Jesus gives His disciples any context for where and who. Ah, but let's look a little closer. "As the Father has sent me." How did the Father send Jesus? John makes that very clear earlier in his gospel when he writes in John 3:17

For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.

Through all these accounts, another truth is clear. God's plan for salvation is a worldwide mission. In fact, Jesus went as far as to say in Matthew 24:14:

And this gospel of the kingdom will be proclaimed throughout the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come.

The second call of the Great Commission is then, "Go to all nations and make Christ known!"

3. Power

How was obedience to this command going to be possible? How could 120 fearful disciples proclaim this message to every nation on the planet? How would they be His witness all over the world? The Great Commission tells us. In Acts 1, the disciples are told they would receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon them. Matthew 28 gives Jesus' promise to be with them to the end of the age. How is Jesus with His people? Through the abiding Holy Spirit Whom Jesus promised He and the Father would send in John 14. This is the same promised Holy Spirit Jesus mentions in Luke 24. In John 20, Jesus breathes on them and tells them to receive the Holy Spirit. In Mark 16, Jesus promises supernatural signs that the Holy Spirit will bring about as confirmation of their message. Finally, in Acts 10, the Holy Spirit isn't prescribed, but He is described when verse 44 tells us,

While Peter was still saying these things, the Holy Spirit fell on all who heard the word.

Looking at all of these accounts together, a third truth is clear. The Great Commission can only be accomplished through the power of the Holy Spirit. Without God, this is impossible. But with God, all things, even a worldwide movement of proclamation, discipleship, and life change, is not only possible, but promised.

The third call of the Great Commission is then, “Go empowered by the Holy Spirit and make Christ known.”

Every Christian and every local church must consider, “Are we making Christ known?” First, are we making Christ known in our own community? Are we equipping the saints, developing evangelism strategies, and living sent*? Our own community is only one piece of this command. What about making Christ known in areas around our region, state, country, and the nations where Christ isn’t being proclaimed?

**“Living sent” might not be a phrase that you use in your church. This would be a great opportunity to introduce it into your regular vernacular. This phrase is the concept that every Christian lives from the posture of the Great Commission. As one pastor has said, “Every Christian is a missionary. We just get our paychecks from different places.” So, whether you are a doctor, lawyer, teacher, stay-at-home mom, or a full-time career missionary, we are all called to “live sent” to obey the Great Commission.*

One of the great tools God has given us to make Christ known is our strategic, cooperative giving through the Annie Armstrong Easter Offering. It gives us the opportunity to fuel evangelism in all of its forms. It allows us through Send Relief to meet needs and see God change lives of those who are far from Him.

And it allows us to partner with others in our family of churches to plant churches everywhere for everyone as Send Network. All of these strategies and all of these churches share one primary ambition—to obey the Great Commission and make Christ known.

When we give to the Annie Armstrong Easter Offering, we are saying, “God, we want to obey your Great Commission. We want to make Christ known all over North America and among the nations. Please take these resources, both dollars and people, and by the power of the Holy Spirit, use them to proclaim the gospel to all people in North America and the nations.”

Questions to consider for closing:

1. In what ways do you (personally and corporately) need to be trained to go as a witness and make Christ known?
2. To which people (locally, regionally, nationally, or globally) does God want you to go and make Christ known?
3. What needs to change in your heart(s) (repentance or faith) in order to go empowered by the Holy Spirit and make Christ known?

Ending

End with an intentional, crafted time of prayer, whether it is in the response time or as part of corporate worship

- The Great Commission in Matthew 28 points out that on that day some worshiped, but others doubted. This is a reminder to us that before you are a proclaimer, you are a worshipper.
 - Begin prayer by worshipping Jesus for who He is.
 - Invite people to pray silently or out loud where they are and use phrases like, “I worship you Jesus because _____.”
 - Give time for people to engage with this prayer prompt.
- The Great Commission is a call to make Christ known to all people.
 - Who are the people (individuals, groups, or nations) who you know don’t know Christ?
 - Invite your congregation to pray for these people by name.
 - Use phrases like, “God would you make yourself known to _____” and “Jesus, please send someone, even me, to share the gospel with _____.”
- The Great Commission reminds us that we can’t obey this command of Jesus in our own power. We must be filled by and live by the power of the Holy Spirit.
 - Pray for the Holy Spirit to empower, embolden, and equip you and your church to make Christ known from your neighborhoods to the nations.
 - Invite people to repent where needed.
 - Invite people to pick up faith where needed.

Sermon outline by Noah Oldham, Executive Director of Send Network at the North American Mission Board.