

## CHRIST'S GREAT COMMISSION

God gave to the resurrected Jesus all power in heaven and earth (Matthew 28:18). With that power Jesus commanded his followers to "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature" (Mark 16:15, 16). Is the church of Christ obeying the command of Jesus Christ?

Consider what Jesus commanded. We can conclude from what Jesus commanded that the **main task** of the church of Christ is to go to everyone and preach the gospel to everyone and baptize anyone who chooses to believe and repent. This main task sets up the church's **secondary task** of teaching all the commandments of the Lord to everyone who is baptized into Christ. (Matthew 28:19, 20.) Furthermore, from Jesus' New Testament we can conclude that the main task of "Preaching" can be divided into two steps: "planting" and "watering" (1 Corinthians 3:6; Luke 8:5, 11). "Planting" is done by broadcasting or scattering the seed of the Word of God. The "watering" is done in order to keep the Word of God on peoples' minds by repeating the story over and over again. Also we can conclude that the church's task of "Going with the gospel" can be divided into the goers and the senders (Romans 10:14, 15; Philippians 1:5; 4:15). If you are a Christian then you should be a goer or a sender. Which one are you?

Please notice these things about Jesus' commission: (1) The church is not charged with choosing the message, just simply accurately, clearly, making it known to the world. (2) The church is not charged with converting people. That's right! You see, Jesus' apostle Paul said that the Lord gives the increase (1 Corinthians 3:7). The Lord pricks the heart of the sinner through the preaching and the teaching of His Word. The church's job in this process is to "preach the word." (2 Timothy 4:2) It is then the hearers' choice to obey or disobey Jesus Christ. (3) Furthermore, the church is not charged with deciding whether to go or not to go based on cost analysis. You see, the church must find a way the gospel to travel and spread! The church need not ask nor worry about the response of people to the preaching of the gospel. It need only ask if the gospel has gone there and is the clear gospel within reach of every person there.

By studying the Great Commission we also conclude that the church should **not** define its "success" by only baptisms or restorations. Baptisms and restorations do not measure the success of the church's mission! Baptisms and restorations are a measurement of soil conditions where the seed is sown. The number of ears the gospel has gotten to is the true means of measuring the success of the church in carrying out the great commission of Christ. The church is successful if it is continuously "advancing" the gospel (cf. Philippians 1:12, ESV). Is the church trying to reach as far as it can into the world? Does the local church reach out into its community trying to reach every creature there?

As the church of Christ goes about fulfilling the Lord's great commission it will experience great swings in emotion. That's right! Jesus' apostle Paul told the Christians at Corinth Greece that he had lived among them "in weakness and in fear and much trembling." (1 Corinthians 2:3 ESV) Since the church is also charged with baptizing people who believe the gospel and repent of their sins (Matthew 28:19), the church is in a position to see the work of God unfolding in the hearts of men and women in the world. This brings great joy to the church members when they see people repent and are baptized. Jesus said that "There is joy before the angels of God over one sinner who repents." (Luke 15:10 ESV) It also brings great joy to the church.

However, the church can also feel great sadness when hearers reject the council of God and are not baptized (cf. Luke 7:29, 30). If hearers do not turn to the Lord then the church may become discouraged and think its work is unsuccessful and in vain. But this is not true. That's right!

When preachers of the gospel go out to preach they can expect to have great joy and great sorrow; preachers can also expect great expense, and great trouble. When Paul was converted to become Jesus' apostle, Jesus said, "I will show him how much he must suffer for the sake of my name." (Acts 9:16 ESV) Indeed, that same apostle Paul predicted, "All who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted...." (2 Timothy 3:12 ESV)

Nevertheless, even in the face of this trouble, the church's commission is to go and preach the gospel to every creature in every nation. When the church works on this task the church of Christ will find its greatest joy. When the church puts the gospel within earshot of more and more people, then the church should feel a great measure of joy. Jesus' apostle Paul suffered imprisonment because of his preaching. But Paul thought that his imprisonment had fallen out for the "furtherance of the gospel" and that his "bonds in Christ" were known even in the palace and "all other places." (Philippians 1:12, 13.) Although he was imprisoned, Paul rejoiced in the expansion of the gospel. That is, more and more people were hearing the good news of Christ!

However, consider the heartache that may also accompany the church's commission to preach to the world. Any generation could become like the generation of Isaiah's day. Isaiah was charged to preach for God when the odds were slim that there would be conversions. If the odds were slim of converting anybody, then why was Isaiah sent to preach? Well God has more reasons for preaching than just to convert people! That's right!

Isaiah's preaching life began one day when he went into the temple to perform his priestly duties. On that day in the temple Isaiah saw a magnificent sight; he saw the Lord. The Lord was high and lifted up in the temple; surrounding the Lord were angelic beings flying around (Isaiah 6:1ff). The Lord finally asked, "Who shall I send? Who will go for us?" Isaiah volunteered, "Here am I, send me." The Lord then gave a strange commission to Isaiah!

"Go, and tell this people, 'Hear ye indeed, but understand not; and see ye indeed, but perceive not.' Make the heart of this people fat, and make their ears heavy, and shut their eyes, lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and convert, and be healed."

That's it! That's the commission given to Isaiah! Jesus echoed that passage when he told his disciples the reason why he spoke in parables (Matthew 13:10-16). Isaiah did not have many converts! Jesus did not have many converts either, even though multitudes heard him preach (cf. John 6:66; cf. Acts 1:15 where only 120 disciples were left after Jesus' ascension)! Isaiah was curious as to how long he was supposed to preach that message.

The Lord's reply was "Until the cities be wasted without inhabitant and the houses without man, and the land be utterly desolate, and the Lord have removed men far away, and there be a great forsaking in the midst of the land." Isaiah was to preach bad news until the collapse came; I don't see how Isaiah could have avoided great heartache and sadness! The only bit of good news the Lord had for Isaiah was that 10% of the people would be left to serve the Lord. The Lord knew the harvest right down to the individual!

Isaiah, out of great hardship, fulfilled his commission by preaching God's testimony to the hard-hearted and hard-of-hearing people, as well as to the ten percent! You see, Isaiah did not know who or where the ten percent would be found. Do we modern preachers think we will do better than Isaiah?! But I dare say this, if the church today could see the conversion of ten percent of its hearers, then I think the church would probably think it was a great harvest!

Christians today must go and preach the good news of Jesus Christ! God acted righteously by sending Jesus to suffer the penalty for human sin (Romans 3:25, 26). God was then justified in forgiving sinners; God then received the power to save (Romans 1:16). Friends, Jesus' accomplishment must now be announced and proclaimed to the world. People must be given the opportunity to take God up on His gracious offer of forgiveness. Hearers who believe and who have the courage must repent of their sins and be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of their sins (Acts 2:38).

The church does not know how many people are in the harvest in any generation, or where those believers might be found. However, the church **does know** that, comparatively speaking, there will be "few" that find the open gateway (Matthew 7:13, 14). Hearers can accept the salvation of God by believing in it, repenting of their sins, and being baptized in the name of Jesus Christ, thus baptized into the forgiveness (Acts 2:37, 38). Those who receive God's forgiveness are then charged to follow all of Jesus' commandments. In view of this the church must follow up and make arrangements to teach Jesus' commandments to the obedient believing people. (Cf. Matthew 28:19.)

## Christ's Great Commission

If the church of Christ grows tired and weary, it may stop preaching the Gospel of Christ. (Cf. Revelation 2:5, KJV).

At the other extreme, anything that grows the church numerically becomes the “great work” of the church. The centuries have witnessed all kinds of innovations or gimmicks that believers have used to gain converts. Anything goes as long as the numbers increase. Yes, an apostate church begins to manufacture unauthorized novelty acts in order to see its membership swell.

Somewhere between these extremes lies a church faithfully scattering the gospel seed far and near, as far as it can reach. The faithful church does not grow weary in well-doing and does not despair. Christ's commission of seed-sowing is being fulfilled!

Visit a church of Christ near you and enter the sowing and reaping business.