

The Great Commission out of Zion

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Introduction

In the next few nights we will hear about the four “All's of the Great Commission, which is for all:

All power in heaven and earth,

All people, Jews and Gentiles, young and old, rich and poor

All that Jesus taught – which is a great deal

All the time, always.

But tonight we will talk about the Great Commission out of Zion.

Greatest commission

Throughout Christian history, the words of Jesus to his disciple, the last words recorded in the Gospel of Matthew, have been called the Great Commission. But really, when we think about it, this is not just a great commission. It should be called the greatest commission! I do not believe there is any greater commission than this.

One of the organic threads that we find throughout the scriptures from Genesis 3 through to Revelation 20 is God's redemptive plan for the salvation of mankind. From the time that Adam and Eve sinned and enslaved themselves to Satan, sin and self, God's central focus has been to glorify Himself and to restore man to the place intended for him in God's creation. In Genesis 3:15 we read of that plan in its very beginning. God says to the serpent: *I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel.* This is referred to by theologians as the *Proto-evangelium*, or the “first gospel”. The epistle to the Galatians refers to Jesus the Messiah as the Son of God, born of the woman (4:4) or *the seed of the woman*.

One of God's greatest principles in his redemptive plan for the salvation of the world is to effect his will in a meek rather than a grandiose way. The manner of the coming of the Messiah, his life and death all testify to that. We will touch on that briefly. God uses humble instruments, you and I, to deliver his message to the people. This is amazing when we realize that God has unlimited ways by which to proclaim the Gospel, and yet chooses to use ordinary, sinful men and women like us to share it with others. Through the work of his Holy Spirit he gives a new birth to those who are dead, blind and deceived. Much can be said about this wonderful scheme.

God's choice

In keeping with His great scheme, God has chosen, humanly speaking, the least suitable candidates to accomplish His most important tasks, and he continues to do that – look around you! Think of Moses, Gideon, King Saul, Samson and the prophets and the kings of Israel.

Moses was the son of slaves, who happened to grow up in Egypt's palace, far from his family and kinsmen. At a young age he became a fugitive after killing an Egyptian who had mistreated a Hebrew man. He fled to the distant land of Midian, and there worked as a shepherd. From Midian the God of Israel called him to be the deliverer of Israel, despite the fact that he was not eloquent, “slow of speech and in tongue” (Ex.

4:10). He was the perfect candidate to speak to the powerful pharaoh and to demand he release his nation of slaves, because God said so! We know that Moses did not consider himself the right one to lead the people out of Egypt, and that is what made him God's perfect candidate. God chose him because Moses had nothing in or of himself and he had to rely on God to accomplish the task. The writer of Hebrews also tell us that when Moses had to make a decision about his future as a young man, he preferred to be mistreated with the people of God than to enjoy the pleasures of sin in the palace (Heb 11:25). He had the right heart and the right priorities!

We know that King Saul, who was anointed the first king of Israel, did not consider himself worthy for that honour. In fact he shied away from that position. He considered himself the least of the people and his tribe of Benjamin as the least of the tribes of Israel. Why should the king of Israel come from within that tribe?

Christ's coming

As we fast-forward to the New Testament era, we see the same phenomena. Take a look at the twelve disciples. We are told they were uneducated common men (Acts 4:13). They were neither high ranking officers in the Roman military, nor successful, highly recognized men. Matthew was a tax collector, an outcast of society. Peter was a fisherman. And yet these were the men that Jesus prayerfully and carefully chose who later turned the world upside down with their zeal, message and commitment.

We know that Christ came in meekness to the world, and lived humbly. He was not a prince born to a royal family. but was born in a manger, far from his hometown and in a place that had no room for him. His earthly father was a simple carpenter, not a highly influential man in society. As an adult, Jesus did not have an actual home. He testified of himself saying "Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head" (Matt 8:20, Luke 9:58). He moved from one town to another, teaching, preaching, healing and casting out evil spirits. He entered Jerusalem for the last time riding on a donkey, not a horse as befits the King of Kings. In one of his last days on earth, he washed the feet of his disciples, including those of the one who would betray him and the one who would later publicly deny him three times. At the most difficult time of his life all his close friends abandoned him. He was mocked and humiliated by all too many people. And at last he allowed men to nail him to a cross and suffered cruel and humiliating death by crucifixion. Philippians 2:5 -11 vividly describes that to us. But after the shame and death came his glorification and triumph over death and evil. He is now seated at the right hand of the Father, ruling over all.

The Son of God, the creator, the *Logos* that was from the beginning, came down from heaven to give himself as a ransom for many. And he did this in humble submission to the Father.

So in view of history we should not be surprised that the Greatest Commission is laid on the shoulders of the people of Israel in the Old Testament and all the believers under the New Testament. An important thing that we can learn is that belonging to the chosen people does not give us any room for boasting! It is not because of us and it is not our doing, but His work. While this is a humbling truth and hard for us to grasp, but nevertheless it is the truth. We are tools in His hands for His glory, and that is a great privilege for us. When God chose the people of Israel it was not because we

were greatest or the best, though we often have the tendency to think so. But it was because of God's love as written by Moses in Deut 7:7 and other places. And when God brought us out of the land of Egypt because of the oppression of the Egyptians, it was so that we could worship him. Moses and Aaron's message was a constant: "Let my people go so that they can worship *me*".

We should not be dismayed by the fact that the Lord uses us, the weak vessels, to accomplish His work in the world. That is one of God's trademarks. Think of Moses, Gideon, and King Saul. And think of Israel, Zion and Jesus. We have seen that Israel was not the strongest or the largest power on the scene. It was an unlikely candidate for any one wanting an ally.

Great commission

Prophet Isaiah prophecies of the changes that the Lord will bring to the people of Israel. And the time when He will declare His salvation and His mighty work among the people. In the well known chapter 53, he describes the essence of the sacrificial work of the Messiah. And at the beginning of chapter 52 he calls the people to rise and to rejoice in His work and to shake off the dust and put on beautiful garments. Then he declares: "How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him who brings good news, who publishes peace, who brings good news of happiness, who publishes salvation, who says to Zion, "Your God reigns." (Isaiah 52:7)

This often has become the Old Testament great commission verse in which the salvation of the Lord is declared. It talks about the beauty of the feet of the ones who bring the good news. There is the act of going, walking and declaring or publishing the word used in the ESV translation). The work which the Lord has done needs to be taken to the people and to be published in Zion and from Zion. Again we have seen how the Messiah came to his people and walked among his people and declared the need for the people to repent and to return to the God of Israel. But He did far more than declaring: in his death and resurrection he brought us healing and gave us salvation. Through his wounds we were healed. Through his death we have life.

Out of Zion – The Land

Land has always played an important role in biblical history and in our world. Its importance is seen not only in the Middle East, and the land of Israel but everywhere, even here in the greater London. Much has been said and written on the subject of the land in the wider Christian community and by those of various theological persuasions. From both biblical and extra-biblical history we can learn much about Zion and the Holy Land. In the past five millennia Zion has gone through many changes. Many world powers have fought for it, claimed it as theirs, killed its inhabitants or driven them out and then lived in their place.

The Importance of Land in God's Economy

In God's economy Land is very important. From the very beginning of time, when God created Adam and Eve, he placed them in a specific place, a beautiful land. This choice territory was described by four rivers that flowed through the Garden of Eden, which was filled with all kinds of trees, including the Tree of Life. But when Adam and Eve sinned against God, he made garments of skin to clothe them but drove them out of the Garden of Eden (Gen. 3:21-24).

In the very first sentence of God's call to Abraham we read "Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you (Gen 12:1). God's call was connected to a particular place in the world, a specific land with clearly defined borders. This is the land that later on was described as flowing with milk and honey, that is to say, fertile farm land abounding with agricultural produce.

However, when the people of God disobeyed the ordinances of God, the land was taken from them and they were driven out. The people of Israel were exiled from their land after centuries of disobedience to the commands of God. This was in line with what happened when Adam and Eve when they disobeyed God.

The Land in the New Testament

We may often think that the Land has no significance in the New Testament era. Paul reminds us in Colossians 2 that we move from shadow to substance as we move from the Old Testament to the New Testament, and we also move from promises to fulfillment. Ultimately the fulfillment and the substance is in Christ, for he is all in all. But nevertheless land in the New Testament also plays an important role. So much so that Jesus just before his death and resurrection comforts his disciples with words about the future land. In John 14:1-2 he says: "Let not your hearts be troubled. Believe in God; believe also in me. In my Father's house are many rooms. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you?" He has gone to prepare a place for us in his Father's home, and that is the ultimate land for all of us, the new heaven and earth, the New Jerusalem.

Zion

Now that we know the importance of land we can also consider Zion. Looking at the Bible historically it is interesting to note that the Promised Land, today's Middle East at large, was always the epicenter from which the Word of God was preached. From Eden to Mount Sinai and from the Sermon on the Mount to the birth of the New Testament church it all happened in the center of the world, Jerusalem. But we need to ask ourselves why Zion has lost her centrality in proclaiming the Word over the last two Millennia? Why is the Word of God not going forth as before?

I think the answer to this is twofold. Firstly, under the New Testament the church has expanded and become universal. From the beginning this was the plan of God. So we see how from the first century, as Dr. Luke recorded the words of Jesus, the disciples were to be witnesses of Christ in Jerusalem, Judea and Samaria and to the remotest parts of the earth. The Gospel was not to stay in Jerusalem. It was to move out from there to the whole world. Thank God that this has happened. The Gospel has reached all the continents of the world.

Secondly, I believe, based on the promises of God, that there is yet a change to come. In Romans 9-11 Paul writes very clearly about the faithfulness of God to his promises to Israel and declares that **all Israel will be saved**. But before this happens Zion will again publish the Word of God to the world at large, a time when the Gospel will go forth from Israel! The Jewish people, scattered throughout the world, will become God's instrument. He in His sovereignty has allowed the Jewish people to scatter all over the world, with the largest Jewish population today living in Israel. These communities will be the light of the world, bringing the Gospel once again to the ends

of the earth. Both Isaiah and Micah prophesy of this, in the exact same words: **And many peoples shall come, and say: "Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord to the house of the God of Jacob, that he may teach us his ways and that we may walk in his paths." For out of Zion shall go the law, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem. (Isaiah 2:3, Micah 4:2)**

We know how the world was turned upside down by a small band of Jesus' Jewish disciples. We have all been blessed by the writings of the Apostle Paul and his life-changing testimony. Can you imagine what our world would be like, with fifty or a hundred people like Paul, with his zeal and total commitment to God? I think that nothing would be more glorious for the Gospel than to see someone from the Jewish nation, the nation that has rejected their Messiah for 2000 years and suffered so much in His name from so-called Christians, proclaiming to the world that Jesus is the Jewish Messiah, the fulfillment of the prophecies of the Bible, and must be worshipped as Lord and Savior! What a powerful testimony – how beautiful those feet will be and how sweet the message that will be published.

Conclusion

We the people, the weak among the people, have been chosen to be the vessels of God in accomplishing his task of making disciples. This is not a task given to the mighty and the strong, the wise and the scholars, but to you and me. So if you see yourself weak and meek, then you are in are in good company, and have your hands full.

Israel today is at the forefront of technology, agriculture, medicine and other areas. In 1954 already in Weismann Institute the first Hebrew computer was invented which was the first in the whole Middle East. Since then we fill a vital role in the advancement of world through the Jewish inventions. While we are first in so many areas, in the area of the Gospel we are somewhat behind. But the day is coming and is approaching fast that the Word of God will come forth once again from Zion. And Israel will fulfill her role in declaring the salvation of God to all people, to the Jew first and then to the Gentile.

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