

**Ascension Sunday**  
**Mathew 28:16-20**  
**Acts 1:6-11**  
**5/16/2010**  
**Lynchburg, Virginia**

**EXHORDIUM**

In the church, we often talk about the Great Commission. And well we should because these words in Matthew were some of the last words of Jesus and His final marching orders. We should take great care and heed what the Lord has called us to do.

There seems to be something glorious afoot in the Earth and the ministry of the church. Many of us grew up in the church vapid about certain forms of eschatology. We had all read *The Late Great Planet Earth*, had our concerns if Ronald Wilson Reagan might be the deceiver and anti-christ and were certain that the moral decline of America meant that the end must be getting near. If only the Lord would return and take us out of this mess. However, I distinctly remember hoping that I could get married and have children before the return of Christ. It was my desire but I felt a little guilty about it.

What is afoot in the church? I recently watched a roundtable discussion with John Piper, Douglas Wilson, and a couple other men, all of whom represented several different eschatological positions. The following discussion and arguments did not surprise me so much but one thing did. Piper asked each man where he thought heaven was. All of them said they thought heaven was on the Earth after the Resurrection. That surprised me greatly as it represents a marked shift in the perception of what true holiness is. True holiness is not airy, pie in the sky spirituality. True holiness is living on the Earth, with the mess of stuff, and yet without sin.

Is not our Lord Jesus truly holy? And yet He walked and dwelt among us. But, you say, He rose from the dead and went up into the clouds. And I reply, yes, He did, but He took His body with Him, and the angels expressly told us, that He will return, body intact, one day to rule on the Earth.

I believe this doctrine of the Ascension and present rule of the Lord Jesus Christ has far reaching ramifications, ideas and practices that we still have very little clarity on. I trust that the Lord is revealing the practical outworkings of these things as we learn to walk in right thinking and right practice.

In my early years, the church had presented what we called ‘the social gospel’. It was into doing works of mercy but had fully compromised the

authority of the Scriptures. The absolute authority of Scripture as the only rule for faith and practice was under siege and ultimately lost the battle in those liberal churches. So, the church lurched away from many Earthly responsibilities into a purely religious realm. What was important was not the subduing, restoration or healing of the earth, but simply getting to heaven. The problem, though, is that this kind of thinking falls short of what God has called us to do.

We are seeing a resurgence of understanding that God has called us to work on this Earth in conjunction with the Lord's true Great Commission. The Earth is the Lord's and all the fullness thereof. The Earth literally belongs to Jesus. It is His. We are His people, created for good works. The Lord has called us to rule and take dominion in the Earth. This is our calling. This is what we do. It is a big job. So, we must look at the work of Jesus in a different way. This brings all sorts of different responsibilities into play. Every institution will one day submit to Christ: Political, corporate, educational, familial, Ecclesiastical. So, we must do our work now in all of these areas, working in conjunction with the Lord Jesus, who is subduing all of His enemies beneath His feet. There are no lawful institutions that are to be left out. All must bend the knee to Christ, in real time, on the Earth, serving the Lord Jesus. Does this not change your view of your duties on the Earth?

## EXEGESIS

### Getting the Great Commission Right

**19 Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: 20 Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. Amen.**

We often quote these two verses and say that they are the marching orders for the Church. We teach that it is our duty to go and tell the nations about Jesus and hope that they will allow Him to be their King. In fact, we have so misconstrued these verses, along with other parts of the Bible, that we have somehow got it into our heads that all we have to do is *tell* them that Jesus wants to be their King. After all, doesn't the Bible say that the gospel will be declared to every nation and then the end will come?

I've told you what the Great Commission is not. Let me tell you what it is. We must include verse 18. The Great Commission is **Matt 28:18-20**  
**18 And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, 28:18 All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. Go, ye, therefore....**

You might not see much difference in, **“Go, ye, therefore into all the world and teach all nations,”** and **“All power and authority is given unto me in heaven and in earth, Go, ye, therefore....”** but I say to you that it is all the difference in the world.

The first version of the Great Commission, without the power and authority, hopes to make Jesus King in some places in the world. The second, with the power and authority already claimed by Jesus, declares that He is King in all places in all worlds. The first relegates Jesus’s rule to some airy place far away from here where sin is no longer a problem to deal with. The second establishes His authority over the fallen earth and all sinners on it. The first makes Him the judge at the last day. The second recognizes that He rules earth from heaven, NOW, with a rod of iron. The first hopes for Jesus to come again someday and sit on a throne and rule whatever saints are saved from the fire at the last day. The second says that Jesus is sitting on that throne now, saving a countless multitude of saints so that He can deliver His Kingdom up to His Father.

Of course, these kinds of ramifications have a very important impact about who we think Jesus is, what we think Jesus is doing, and how we live our lives in His presence. Because He is King over all things, we must learn His rules so that we can rightly submit to His rule. But He has not left us alone to do this. He has left us the witness of His Word. He has promised us that He will never leave us and that He will always be with us. Pentecost is our power, too.

### **What is the Lord Jesus Doing Now?**

Luke is the writer of Acts. In the first few verses of this book, he reminds Theophilus of his former treatise about what Jesus *began* to do and teach until He was taken up. That book would be the book of Luke.

But like many familiar passages, we cruise right on past something very important. The former book was about Jesus’s doings up until the Ascension. This book of Acts is about what Jesus continues to do, through the lives of His witnesses, after the Ascension. This is important because, for the most part, this is counter to our way of thinking.

Our tendency is to think of Jesus up in heaven and that our goal and His goal is to get us up to heaven someday. But Jesus is not a disembodied Spirit in Heaven. This is especially significant. The Bible tells us that God is a Spirit and those that worship Him must worship Him in Spirit and Truth. But something particularly strange has occurred in the Incarnation. God has become flesh and blood. The Spirit of God has put on flesh in the person of Jesus Christ. And God will remain in that flesh, God as Immanuel, God

with us, as man, for all eternity. So, our goal is not to get out of these bad bodies but rather, to get a new resurrected body so that we can be fully human, like Jesus. Of course, Jesus is both fully God and fully man. What I mean about Jesus being fully human is that He is the complete man. He is the perfect man. He is the new Adam, unfallen, and now resurrected, without sin and without the possibility of sin. We aspire to that same resurrection that will make us fully man, like Jesus.

This is no trifle. It dramatically changes how we view the world, God's purposes, our purposes here on Earth and what God's long term purposes are. If Jesus escaped His body and got back to Heaven, then that would give us our trajectory. But if Jesus was given a perfect body, one that will never die again, then this also gives us our trajectory.

The fact that Jesus is in heaven is important. Heaven is stuff because Jesus is stuff. Getting out of our body is not our end goal. Subduing our body is our end goal. By God's grace, we do that now, by the power of the Holy Spirit and we look to the Resurrection of the Body so that our bodies will be fully subdued. The reign of Jesus is the subduing of His body, the Church. He rules until all the bride is completely beautiful, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing. But this is not done when He takes the last three survivors to heaven.

The book of Acts goes out of its way to teach us about the ever-expanding Church. Once the Holy Spirit comes in a new and mighty way, then the saints are unleashed to go from Jerusalem, to Judea to Samaria and to the utter ends of the earth.

**3 To whom also he shewed himself alive after his passion by many infallible proofs, being seen of them forty days, and speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God: 4 And, being assembled together with them, commanded them that they should not depart from Jerusalem, but wait for the promise of the Father, which, saith he, ye have heard of me.**

The saints were given their marching orders but they were told to wait until the Holy Spirit came to go about fulfilling these orders. It is amazing how we whittle down the Words of God to the bare minimum to believe in order to be saved. Just take Jesus into your heart, that's enough. Just believe that He is the Savior of a few chosen elect ones, that's enough.

Didn't Israel make the same mistake? They thought the Messiah would be the King of Israel, the King of the Jews and Jesus is even crucified for this offense against Caesar. However, that was not the Promise of the Messiah. They did not have faith to believe anything bigger than the

Messiah will come and kick the occupying force out of Jerusalem. But the promise was much greater than that. Abraham was promised the nations, plural. He was to be the Father of many peoples, not just of the Jews.

God had revealed that Messiah would be the light of the Gentiles. Well, once you begin to speak this way, it opens up the entire earth. Surely, they thought, that cannot be the case. Maybe, Messiah will be a little light, shining slightly beyond the borders of Jerusalem, maybe up to Ancient Israel? Maybe, that is how the Gentiles will be blessed. But the promise is greater than that. Now, we have had our vision expanded a great deal since those early days. The gospel that Jesus is King of all the earth has spread a very great distance. It has even reached us here in the utter ends of the earth. But it must go even further, for the world must be saved, just as Jesus promised. He told us that His Father so loved the world that He sent His Son to save it. We cannot imagine God with such great affection. But He will continue to winnow wheat and chaff until the harvest is complete, gathering up His harvest from the four winds.

**6 When they therefore were come together, they asked of him, saying, Lord, wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel? 7 And he said unto them, It is not for you to know the times or the seasons, which the Father hath put in his own power.**

The disciples asked, “Are you restoring the Kingdom to Israel? We think, No that is not what Jesus did. Or, we might think that the disciples asked the wrong question, still thinking in Earthly terms. He just went to heaven so the Holy Spirit could make us nice little boys and girls until we can get out of our sin suit. But that is not what Jesus says to them. He tells them to wait a little longer. How much longer? Ten days.

## **EXHORTATION**

**8 But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth. 9 And when he had spoken these things, while they beheld, he was taken up; and a cloud received him out of their sight.**

We think that Jesus told the disciples, “No, I am not restoring the kingdom to Israel. You misunderstood what my kingdom is about. It is not about kings on the earth. It is about kings in heaven. I am a heavenly king and the earth will have to make do on its own.”

I don't think that is what these verses teach at all. In fact, the text of the book of Acts makes it very clear what these verses are teaching. The

subsequent history of Christians in the Roman Empire also teaches us what they thought. They thought Jesus was King over Caesar.

Christians in Rome were not persecuted because they believed in Jesus, but rather, because they believed Jesus ruled over every other god, including Caesar. Rome was very tolerant of other religions and other gods. There was a multitude of gods in Rome. She could have tolerated another deity in Jesus Christ. But the Christians would not have this. They said Jesus was not only a god but the only one, not only a king, but the highest king, the king of kings. And everybody had to worship this God, Jesus, or they were worshipping no god. And that everybody had to submit to this King, Jesus, or they were not in submission to the true ruler of hearts and nations.

*The point that Jesus is making in these verses is that He is not restoring the Kingdom to Israel, declining since the days of Rehoboam and lost in the days of Zedekiah, but rather that He is restoring the Kingdom of the entire earth that was lost in the days of Adam.*

We think of Jesus rising up and sitting on a cloud, so His body must have been pretty airy at that point. But that is not the kind of cloud He rose up into. He rose into the glory cloud of God. This cloud was great heavy stuff. It was a cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night. This was Jesus coming in the clouds to be welcomed into the presence of God, the Father.

We must remember that Jesus had already given them the Great Commission before He ascended. Here, He tells them to wait in Jerusalem until the Spirit of Promise comes. But the Spirit does not come so that they can just stay in Jerusalem, glorying in God's goodness to them. Jesus tells them that the Spirit comes so that they will be witnesses, starting in Jerusalem and spreading from there to the entire world.

They are witnesses of His Resurrection, that He overcame death proving that He is the Son of God. They are witnesses that all authority has been given to Him. He is King of all the earth. The disciples were to go and tell the nations that their King is enthroned and reigning. They are to call all men everywhere to repentance so that they will turn from every other pretender to the throne and submit to the one true King. This Jesus is not just the King of Hearts but He is the King of Nations, Rulers, Cities, Churches, Families, Businesses, politics, Colleges and individuals.

And what is more, He will not share His rule with anyone. He demands perfect allegiance and will have no rivals. He has promised to defeat every foe, to hunt down and subdue every enemy. Although the Father has handed Him the throne, He will not rest until His work is completely accomplished. His rule is so complete that He will not even

tolerate sin and death in His Kingdom. After He has subdued all of His other enemies on the earth, the Resurrection will occur and all the saints will be given new bodies. When that happens, they will sin no more. When sin is abolished and all is put right as at the beginning before Adam sinned, then death will have lost its sting. Death will be swallowed up in the absolute victorious rule of King Jesus.

**<sup>10</sup>And while they looked stedfastly toward heaven as he went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel; <sup>11</sup>Which also said, Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? this same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven.**

Men, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? Well, maybe they could have said that they were praying? Or Worshipping Jesus? Or, waiting in faith for the Promise? Or some other spiritual retort?

But what was the fact of the matter? They were dismayed. They were shocked that Jesus would leave them. They were rendered powerless without the Lord. Thank the Lord that He did not leave them that way. In just a short time, the Spirit came in power and these same incredulous men set the world on fire.

But what do we make of the angel's statement. What are you doing looking up to heaven? Don't you men have something to do? Didn't Jesus tell you to go out into the world? Didn't He tell you to disciple the nations? Didn't He tell you to baptize them and teach them all the things that I taught you?

Ya, but, where is Jesus. We need Him.

O, wait until you see what a gift He has in store for you. You are not going to believe it. Then you'll be ready to go.

But even after the Spirit comes, it takes a persecution to get them going. But they finally get it, taking the gospel, the rule and reign of King Jesus to the ends of the Earth.

To be sure, this good news is that man is redeemed, forgiven and healed in Jesus Christ. That is the beginning of the good news. But it is not the end. Because we are redeemed, brought into His kingdom and made His servants, then we are to go out and do what He has commanded us to do, until all of His enemies are subdued beneath His feet.

Then will He return and give the Kingdom to His Father.