



VILLAGE BIBLE CHURCH

REDISCOVER CHURCH

The Great Commission

Matthew 28:18–20

Josh Caterer | November 5, 2023



As I was preparing this message, digging into the passage we're going to be looking at this morning, I was struck by the connection between worship and preaching. I know those seem like very different things, but they have one important thing in common—or at least they should if we're doing it right. Worship and preaching are both rooted in the Word of God, and they are both ways of interacting with God's Word so that we can internalize it and be shaped by it.

That's obviously what we're doing when we hear the Word being preached, especially the kind of expository preaching that we are committed to here at Village, going through the text verse by verse with the priority of being faithful to the text. That is also a priority we have in our worship, deciding what songs to sing, or whether a song should even be included in our repertoire of songs at all. The things we look for aren't primarily, "Is it catchy? Does it have a beat? Can I dance to it?" We're looking first of all at, "Are the lyrics biblical? Are they biblically accurate? Is there some kind of theological substance?" So when we sing the songs, will we be taking God's revealed truth and singing it back to Him and in the process hiding it in our hearts? This is what we do with a good worship song.

For example, a lot of the wonderful old hymns of the church. One of my personal favorites is "Great is Thy faithfulness, O God my Father, there is no shadow of turning with Thee." Now, as a songwriter, that line really strikes me: "No shadow of turning with Thee." That's really poetic. I wish I had written that. But the thing is, God wrote it. It's from His Word. It comes from James 1:17: *"Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights with whom there is no variation or shadow of turning."* So we're taking God's truth and singing it back to Him.

Or when we sing a newer song, like we sang this morning. One of my favorite newer songs is "Yet not I, but Through Christ in Me." There's this really cool part in the second verse: "I labor on in weakness and rejoicing, for in my need His power is displayed." Again, a very cool line. It's well written. That comes right out of God's Word in 2 Corinthians 12:9, which says, *"My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness."* And the apostle Paul goes on to say, *"I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me."* So it's taking God's truth and singing it back to Him. "In my need, His power is displayed." Whatever it is that we're doing here in our worship and preaching—in every aspect of our services—we want it all to be built on the foundation of God's holy Word. Otherwise, we labor in vain who build it, amen?

This is the last message in our sermon series called "Rediscover Church" which has been a great series. It's helped us to think about and understand what it is we're doing here. Why do we keep getting together like this? What is this thing called church? We do all this stuff—Sunday services, special events, concerts in the parking lot, garage sales, men's breakfast, women's dinners, student ministries, fall camp, small groups—every week there's so much stuff! Why do we do all this? What is this church thing supposed to be? Sometimes we can fall into this habit of saying, "Well, we go to church because...that's what we do. ...we're supposed to. ...we're Christians. ...Christians go to church. ...we're church people. ...it's a tradition." But that's not

really the reason we're doing this. If we don't understand the reasons we're doing something, then we can't really tell if we're doing it well. If we don't know what the goals are, we can't tell if we're hitting them or not, right?

So that's what this series has been about: looking at these God-given, biblically-based goals we're supposed to be achieving as a church. This is God's thing. We didn't invent this. People didn't invent this idea of getting together to have church. He's the One Who said, *"On this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it"* (Matthew 16:18). He's the One Who tells us in His Word the kinds of things the church is supposed to be about. We've been looking at some of those things along the way. We've talked about the ordinances—baptism and communion. We've looked at the importance of preaching and teaching. We studied the concept of church discipline and how we're supposed to approach that. We've looked at the roles of elders and how we're supposed to fulfill that. And this morning we're going to wrap it up and put a big bow on it by tackling the big one: the Great Commission, the overarching mission of the church.

Turn in your Bibles to the Gospel of Matthew, chapter 28. We will be looking at the end of the chapter. This takes place after Jesus was resurrected, during a period of time when He was appearing to His disciples and speaking with them before His ascension into heaven. So in this scene, the eleven remaining disciples, minus Judas, are gathered on a mountainside in Galilee, then Jesus appears to them. He gives them these parting words, which are the last verses in the last chapter of the Gospel of Matthew. Jesus leaves them with this, beginning in verse 18:

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."

In our small group study guide, this chapter is entitled "How do we love outsiders?" because the Great Commission is about outsiders. Up to this point in the series, we've been focusing on a lot of in-house things, looking at how things are supposed to work here. But the Great Commission points us outward. It's about reaching out to people outside the church, helping them to be brought into this family of God, so they can become disciples of Jesus Christ as well. That's the goal. That's the mission of the Great Commission.

As we look through this passage, we're going to see in the text that in order to fulfill the Great Commission, it requires four things. For each of those four things, I want to ask a couple questions: what does it look like for the church and what does it look like for us as individuals? That's our road map. So with that in mind, let's go through these four things.

Fulfilling the Great Commission requires action.

Fulfilling the Great Commission starts with an action word at the beginning of verse 19, where it says, *"Go."* The previous verse really is a set-up for that. It's a statement of authority by which the Commission is about to be given. It's sort of like when somebody gets married and the person who is performing the ceremony says, *"By the power vested in me by the state of Illinois..."* or maybe the state of Nevada, depending on the circumstances. Now I'm getting two thumbs up from my wife because we actually got married in Las Vegas. It was fun—and it took because we're still married. So it's legit. But not everybody takes the Vegas route.

So whatever state you're in, the person says, *"By the power vested in me by this state, I now pronounce you man and wife."* But before he makes the pronouncement, he establishes his authority. He says, *"I'm not just some random guy off the street here, pronouncing, 'Oh, you're man and wife. Good luck.'"* No. He states, *"I can do this. I've been licensed to do this, so what I'm about to say carries some weight."*

Likewise, Jesus says in verse 18, *"By the power invested in Me by God, Who has given Me all authority in heaven and on earth, by that authority I give you this Commission,"* and that starts with the word *"Go."* It's an action word. In other words, *"Don't just sit there—get up, put your shoes on, go out there and start making some disciples. Because the salvation you've been given is not just for you to enjoy privately. We're not creating a country club here. This is not a gated community. It's meant to be shared. It's supposed to be broadcast and multiplied."* The first word here is *"Go."*

What does this mean for the church?

This means that we're supposed to be involved in the advancement of the gospel in the world. We're not just supposed to preach it here; we're advancing the gospel in the world and there are various ways we do this.

One of the big ways we do this on a global scale, of course, is supporting missionaries. If you give tithes and offerings to this church, you know that part of every dollar you give goes to support gospel ministries all over the world, in places like the Philippines, Mexico, Africa, Poland, Israel, and Alaska. We just had one of our missionaries from Alaska, Niki Thurkow, come back a couple weeks ago and share some updates of the wonderful ministry that's going on up there. So we can see the fruit of the support we're giving. All the support we provide to all these missionaries all over the world is all part of our church's attempt to fulfill this Great Commission, to go to all the nations.

Closer to home, we do things that reach out to the surrounding community. We go to the Fox Valley area and try to be ambassadors for Christ in all the ways I mentioned earlier, these various things we're always doing like garage sales, outdoor concerts, opening the doors of our church and inviting people to come here to our property.

There are also things that take us out to the surrounding communities, like local missions trips. We do prison ministries. We have off-site events. Even something like the Barn Bash is an attempt to be a Christian presence in our community so people can see and interact with Bible-believing Christians. We can shine the light of Christ in that way. These are things we're all doing as a church body to fulfill that Commission and that call to go.

What does this mean for us as individuals?

The Great Commission tells us that we're not supposed to be living in a bubble. You know what I mean by the bubble? The bubble is where you only ever hang around with Christians. All your friends are Christians, your family are Christians. Most of your free time is spent doing church stuff. Maybe you only get together with other believers, just binge watching "The Chosen" all the time. You're always doing some Christian-related stuff with Christian people. And that's great. We're supposed to spend time with believers.

The Bible tells us we're supposed to have a special bond, a special love for our brothers and sisters in Christ. We draw strength from each other. But if it stops there and we create this hermetically sealed bubble, we don't end up having any real relationships or significant interactions with unsaved, non-Christian people. A lot of times we kind of prefer it that way. We just want to stay in the bubble because it's nice in there. It's comfortable. It's safe. No one makes fun of your faith in the bubble. No one insults you or is offended by you or hostile toward you because of what you believe in the bubble, because in the bubble everybody shares your beliefs. So you don't have to deal with people who think that what you believe is stupid. We want to stay in this bubble, but Jesus tells us here, "You can't do that, because I want to use you to make disciples of all nations and you can't do that in a bubble."

The Great Commission calls us to step out. It would be very easy for me to live in a bubble because I work at a church. So just by going to work, going home, going back to work and going home, I could go for weeks, months maybe, without having any real conversations with unsaved people, unless it counts to order something at Starbucks where you have to talk to the cashier for a second. But I don't think that really counts. So I could fall into this bubble pretty easily. Which is why it's been very important for me personally to continue playing in a band I'm involved with. Some of you know that I play in a rock band called The Smoking Popes. Yeah, that always gets a little giggle when I mention that name in church, but that's the name of this band. I used to do this band full time before I got saved, then I walked away from it for a few years. But I felt the Lord calling me back to it, considering it a kind of mission field.

A lot of times in church, we would talk about how to build bridges to the world around us, so I became increasingly convinced, "Well, I've got this bridge; I just don't go over it anymore." I felt convicted that I needed to return and go over that bridge, so I got the band back together. It's not a full-time thing anymore. We still sometimes travel around and go to shows out of state. I'll tell you, it is a mission field because playing in this band regularly puts me into situations where Christians are the minority. Often it seems like I'm pretty much the only Bible-believing Christian in the room. I've had some very surprising and significant interactions, particularly when I'm sitting backstage with other bands that we're playing with. They're not Christian bands, but

these are people who find out I'm a Christian. They might even have heard that I'm a minister and work at a church. They're real interested in this.

A lot of times these people end up telling me, "I went to church when I was a kid. My parents used to make me go, but I kind of stopped going." You can tell there's something going on in their minds. There's some interest. They have a sense that there was some truth there, maybe something of value. They just don't have any connection to it anymore. So the fact that I'm there and believe the Bible, makes them think about these two worlds that aren't supposed to collide. "The church and the rock band are like two separate worlds, so how are they colliding in you? How can you embody both?" They're very interested in this. So I've had some conversations about God and spiritual truths with people who don't normally have that conversation, because they don't go to church. I'm going to them and am grateful to God for every seed I've been able to plant. I know He uses these conversations in people's lives.

So what I'm saying here is that I think you should all join rock bands and go on tour. That is my recommendation. No, I'm kidding. What I'm saying is reconsider whatever your version of that is. We all have different situations. We all have different spheres of influence. We all have ways that we could be intentionally stepping out of our bubble and putting ourselves in direct and more significant contact with people who need the influence of a Bible-believing, born-again Christian person in their lives. They're not going to get it here, because they don't come here, do they? God calls us to go do that out there. All I would say is pray for the Lord's leading in this and He will make it clear to you. A lot of you may be doing things like this already. If not, pray for God's leading, then be willing to go wherever He calls you. It will be interesting. It will be your way of personally fulfilling this Commission to go. The Great Commission requires action.

Fulfilling the Great Commission requires doctrine.

Now, doctrine is a word that frightens some people. They're like, "Ah, alright Mr. Fancy-pants, talking about doctrine. You're going to start using crazy words." Let me put your mind at ease about this. I'm not talking about highfalutin intellectual stuff. If you look the word 'doctrine' up in dictionary.com, like I did, it means "a belief or set of beliefs held and taught by a church, political party or other group." So when I say doctrine, I'm just talking about our set of beliefs about God, what we believe about Who God is and how He works. Christianity has a specific set of beliefs that are different from other religions, right? We believe different things about God that other religions don't believe.

"Like what?" you might ask. Well, I'm glad you brought it up. One of those things is right here in the Great Commission. We see it in verse 19, where it says, *"Baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit."* This is the doctrine of the Trinity, the idea that there is one God in three distinct Persons. It's a uniquely Christian doctrine.

Notice that Jesus doesn't say, "Just go and baptize people. Just baptize them." He doesn't even stop by saying, "Baptize them in the name of God." He gets specific about this God. What is the character and nature of this God? Who has this God revealed Himself to be? "Go and baptize them in the name of the God Who has revealed Himself to be one God existing in three eternally distinct Persons." That's the message we're supposed to carry forward. So fulfilling the Great Commission requires having some handle on doctrinal things.

What does this mean for us as the church?

This means that a church needs to define its understanding of the essential doctrines of Christianity, then commit itself to holding fast to those doctrines in all things at all times. Typically this starts with a church developing some kind of doctrinal statement. Most churches have them. Our church certainly does. A doctrinal statement encapsulates what we believe to be the core doctrines of the Christian faith. I know that the elders of our church at some point in our church's history spent a lot of time, energy, prayer and discussion making sure our doctrinal statement is biblically accurate. From that point on, they made sure that all the teaching and preaching that will take place here—whether it's in the pulpit or in any of the teaching ministries of the church, including student ministries, men's and women's ministries—has to be in line with our doctrinal statement. It's important and we are committed to this as a church.

What does this mean for us as individuals?

This also means we all need to have some basic working knowledge of the core doctrines of the faith. Things like the Trinity, the authority of Scripture, the deity of Christ, forgiveness of sin, salvation by faith alone in Christ alone. If you understand these basic things, you can do your part to fulfill the Great Commission by sharing the gospel with other people. I know that one of the most common reasons people have for not sharing their faith and not talking to people about Jesus is that they're afraid they don't know enough. They don't have enough information. They're intimidated by the idea of doctrine. "What if I get into a situation where people start asking me hard questions and I can't answer them? I'm not equipped to do this, so I'm going to shy away from it."

Let me give you an encouragement coupled with a challenge. My encouragement to you today is this: you really don't need a PhD to talk to people about Jesus. If you understand the basics—that we are all sinners, that our sin separates us from God, that God sent His Son Jesus to die for our sins on the cross so we can be forgiven, that Jesus defeated death and rose from the grave so that through faith in Him we can have eternal life—if you've got that, you have enough information. That's what you need. These things are doctrines. You don't need any more knowledge than that.

You may encounter some people who try to trip you up with gotcha-type questions, but those people's hearts are hardened to you anyway. Those aren't the people you're primarily concerned about. You're looking for the people who are actually open to the gospel because God has begun to stir something in their hearts and they're looking for truth. You can present to them these simple basic doctrines of the Christian faith that have been revealed through Scripture and God will use that interaction to draw that person to Himself through what you're telling them.

So that's my encouragement. Don't be intimidated. You have enough doctrine to start doing this.

The challenge that goes along with this is whatever level of doctrinal understanding you have, whether you just have the basics, or whether you're a scholar who does have a PhD in theology, either way, there's always more to know. We should always be committed to growing in our understanding of Christian doctrine. Maybe you've heard this expression, "The gospel is simple enough for a child to understand, but profound enough for a person to spend their life studying without ever grasping its fullness." So if you have a simple gospel understanding that a child can understand, you're equipped to do this.

Then if you dedicate yourself to diving into God's truth and studying it, you will never reach the bottom of the depths of the amazing and wondrous mystery of God's revealed truth. This will be an intellectually satisfying endeavor for your entire life. We should be committed to always deepening our knowledge of the things of God, of His Word, of these doctrines.

So the main thing, our starting point, is to make sure we've got our basic doctrine correct. Fulfilling the Great Commission requires doctrine. That's the second thing.

Fulfilling the Great Commission requires discipline.

We're not talking about church discipline here; we've talked about that previously when Pastor Tim covered that. I'm talking about the kind of self-discipline, self-control, that it takes to be obedient to the teachings and commands of the Lord in order for a person to grow in holiness and godliness. It says in verse 20, *"Teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you..."*

Now, it's very important for us to understand that our obedience to God does not save us. We need to be reminded of this because we get it mixed up a lot. You can read the Great Commission and say, "Oh, God tells us to observe all that He has commanded, so I'm supposed to observe all that He has commanded in order to be saved. If I'm not doing that, if I'm not getting it all right, I'm not saved. I must not be a Christian." That's not how this works, okay?

There is nothing that we can do, no matter how good we are, no matter how obedient we are, to earn or deserve our salvation. We are all sinners deserving of God's wrath. *"For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified by his grace as a gift"* (Romans 3:23-24). Our salvation is a gift that we receive by faith. We don't earn it by being good. We need to know that right off the bat. Once we have received the gift of salvation, then we respond by becoming obedient to Him. Out of love, gratitude, and worship, we become obedient to Him. That's when we move from salvation into sanctification—the process of growing in Christlikeness—as we increasingly follow His commands. That's a process called discipleship Which is what the

Great Commission is calling us to do: make disciples. Not just people who believe, but people who are growing in Christlikeness by applying themselves to all He has commanded.

What does this mean for us as the church?

This means we need to go beyond the basics in our teaching, which is what we do here at Village Bible Church. This is why we are committed to expository preaching, where we go through entire books of the Bible, chapter by chapter, verse by verse, unpacking what it says—all of it, not just the low-hanging fruit.

Now that we're wrapping up the Rediscover Church series, we're going to dive back into a book of the Bible, going through Jude, verse by verse. That's how we roll. As a church, we're committed to teaching all that the Lord has commanded. It requires a certain discipline.

What does this mean for us as individuals?

Quite simply, this means we have to be willing to practice what we preach. If you don't practice what you preach, there's a word for that. It's called being a hypocrite. And nobody likes a hypocrite. So if we are going to try to fulfill this Commission—to teach people to observe all that He has commanded—we have to teach it by example. That means we need to at least be trying to make some kind of an effort to do that in our own lives, which requires some level of spiritual discipline.

Now, if you're like me, the term 'spiritual discipline' makes you perspire a little bit and feel slightly nauseous. I'm not a disciplined person in my life. Spiritual discipline to me conjures up a mental image of a person who begins each day with a strict regimen of morning devotions, with their prayer journal and their study Bible open before them, doing this religiously for 30 minutes each day before they eat breakfast. I don't present that as an extreme or unrealistic way to approach your spiritual life; I've personally known a lot of Christians, some in this church, who do that. That's awesome. But I am not, nor have I ever been, a person who can do that. I have tried, but that approach doesn't work for me. I'm not a morning person. Maybe it's because I'm a musician, so I'm all artsy, a free spirit, not able to commit to doing things at the same time every day. That approach just doesn't work for me.

I've tried doing this "Bible in a year" thing, with "Here's all the chapters you're supposed to be reading every day." Every time I get into Numbers, it's over. I have read the entire Bible, I assure you, just not all in a row in one year. I'm more of an ad hoc kind of guy. I have found that my approach to going through God's Word with any sense of discipline is to try to incorporate it in my drive times. Obviously not reading and driving; that's dangerous and illegal. When I'm driving, there are all these things I could listen to: Spotify, SiriusXM, a million podcasts, but I also have a phone app that has both Old and New Testaments in audio form. I live about 15 minutes away from the church, so I get little snippets of it that way. I also take longer drives in the aforementioned band I'm in when we'll drive to other states. I'll be in the van for hours, so I can put in my ear buds. What am I going to listen to? I make a commitment to spending some portion of that time allowing the very gifted Mr. Max McLean read God's Word to me. He's really good at it. He puts a certain spin on it. I love his delivery.

If I'm listening to some book of the Bible I've read before, maybe many times, I'm listening for some verse or two to jump out at me. I trust you know what I'm talking about; no matter how many times you've read a certain book of the Bible, every time you read it, if you're actually engaging with it and paying attention, something new will pop out. You'll see a verse in a different way. God will speak to you in a different way. That's the Holy Spirit doing that.

So when I'm listening for those kind of verses and they pop out at me, I'll try—without endangering the lives of myself or others—to do a little screen grab of that verse when it's going by, because I want to come back to that later, making it my verse of the day to meditate on. Maybe it's not as impressive as the 30-minute thing before breakfast, but this is my version of what it looks like to have some disciplined approach to the Word of God. It's the best I can do. I'm trying.

That's what we should all be doing—trying. Maybe it looks different for you than it does for me. The reason I'm doing this is not because I have this sense of obligation; I do it because I actually believe the things I said earlier when I was praying. I believe that God's Word is living and active. I actually want it to be active in my life because when I yield myself to that, it is always a blessing. So I'm applying myself to that as I can and as we all should.

So discipline is the third thing that is required to fulfill this Great Commission. If we are called to teach this to other people, we should be doing it ourselves and that requires some level of discipline.

Fulfilling the Great Commission requires dependence.

Here's the fourth thing and this will be quick because the application ends up being the same for the church as it is for individuals. Fulfilling the Great Commission requires dependence. In the last part of verse 20, Jesus says, *"Behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age."*

When Jesus has presented this potentially overwhelming Commission to His people, telling them to go and make disciples of all nations, we're like, "Disciples of all nations? I'm having a hard enough time with my own discipleship, observing some of what You've commanded—as much of it as I can handle at one time. Now I'm supposed to take all of that to all the nations of the world?"

I think Jesus anticipated this sort of reaction. He says, "Don't worry. I am with you. I will give you the strength. I will do this through you." He's not just saying that to the apostles who were there at the time. He says, "I will be with you always, to the end of the age," which includes the year 2023 in Sugar Grove, Illinois. Jesus Christ is saying to us that He will be with us, empowering us to fulfill the Great Commission to which He has called His church. It's a Commission to go. It's a Commission that requires this action, this doctrine, and this discipline. We can do this only in total dependence on the presence of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen?

Village Bible Church | 847 North State Route 47, Sugar Grove, IL 60554 | (630) 466-7198 | www.villagebible.org/sugar-grove

All Scriptures quoted directly English Standard Version unless otherwise noted.

Note: This transcription has been provided by Sermon Transcribers (www.sermontranscribers.com).