

INTRODUCTION

Seventeen years ago, our nation was attacked by terrorists flying jets into the Twin Towers and the Pentagon. Our speaker last week, Chaplain Endel Lee, was sent up to Ground Zero to offer ministry to those who were helping clear away the mass of twisted steel. Have you ever wondered what happened to the pile of rubble and steel? Some of the steel was melted and was used in the construction of a U.S. Naval ship. The USS New York was built using 7.5 tons of steel from the Twin Towers. It was commissioned on March 1, 2008 to join the global fight to protect our nation. In the ship's crest, you can find the Twin Towers along with the motto "Never Forget."

So, can you imagine what a tragedy it would be if the USS New York remained in the harbor where it was commissioned and never left the safety of the dock? It was commissioned for a task. Since it was commissioned, it has sailed around the world, including spending time in the Persian Gulf. After the main perpetrator of the massacre in Benghazi was arrested, he was brought back to the U.S. on board the USS New York.

We understand the importance of the commissioning of a navy vessel, but do we really take seriously the commissioning Jesus gave us? He launched the church to go into every part of the world and make disciples. But for many people, the Great Commission has become the Great Omission. When a church doesn't make evangelism and missions their priority, they practice the Great Omission. A Christian who never attempts to share his faith has embraced the Great Omission.

Matthew 28:16-20 (CSB). "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.'"

One of the greatest missionaries of the modern era was Hudson Taylor. He arrived in China at age 21 to practice medicine and share the Gospel. He adopted the dress and language of the Chinese and spent 51 years of his life in China. He often returned home to England to challenge the Christians there to volunteer for missions. He wrote: "Can all the Christians in England sit still with folded arms while these multitudes (in China) are perishing—perishing for lack of knowledge—for lack of that knowledge which England possesses so richly?...The Great Commission is not a suggestion to be considered; it is a command to be obeyed." By the time he died in 1901, there were 850 missionaries working through his China Inland Mission. In fact, when I first visited the #1 Hospital in our partner city, Qujing, I was informed that it was started by Presbyterian Missionaries at the beginning of the 20th Century.

So today, I want to challenge you to find your role in fulfilling the Great Commission. I want us to consider three truths about the Great Commission.

I. JESUS SPOKE WITH THE GREATEST AUTHORITY.

He said, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.” What’s amazing about the Great Commission is that Jesus originally spoke these words to eleven guys and the Bible said some of them were still a little doubtful. But He told those eleven men to go throughout the world with the good news.

Two milk cows were eating grass when a milk truck drove by. A sign on the truck said, “Fresh milk. Homogenized, Pasteurized, Fortified, Low-fat, Vitamin-enriched.” After reading the descriptions, one cow said to the other, “It kinda’ makes you feel inadequate, doesn’t it?”

Can you imagine how inadequate the disciples must have felt when they heard this command? I can just imagine that Simon Peter spoke up and whined, “But Lord, we’re just eleven men, and most of us are uneducated fishermen. We have no money, no machinery, and no means. Maybe we can hang around here and make an impact on the Galilee, but do really want us to go to ‘all nations?’ How can we stand before the military might of the Roman Empire? How can we argue with the sophistication and intellectualism of the Greeks? Lord, we can’t do it!”

And the Lord said, “No you can’t do it. That’s why I’m giving you both the authority and the power to do it.” Jesus claimed to have all authority in heaven. That means whenever Jesus speaks in heaven, it is done. He also claimed to have all authority on earth. And He has given that authority to us.

“When Jesus had called the Twelve together, he gave them power and authority to drive out all demons and to cure diseases, and he sent them out to proclaim the kingdom of God and to heal the sick.” (Luke 9:1-2 NIV)

Have you ever seen a police movie or television show where a suspect is fleeing arrest? The officer often says, “Stop in the name of the law!” He’s not telling that person to stop in his own name, but he is saying it under the authority of the law. He is wearing a uniform and a badge that has behind it the full authority of our judicial system.

We don’t go out and share the gospel in the name of Baptists, or in the name of America, or in our own name. We share the gospel in the name of Jesus, because He has given us the authority and the power.

II. JESUS GAVE US THE GREATEST ASSIGNMENT.

He said, “Therefore go and make disciples of all nations.” Let’s unpack our assignment for a moment. When Jesus said, “Go” He used the word as a participle, which means He really said, “As you are going, make disciples of all nations.” So, this isn’t a command for us to get up and go to someplace we’ve never been to before, like Africa or China. It can mean that, but what Jesus was really saying was, “As you’re going through your normal traffic patterns of life, make disciples.”

The word “nations” doesn’t mean countries with boundaries like Canada, Mexico, or Peru. It is the word *ethnos*. It means we are to take the good news to every ethnic group on earth. When you live in town like Tyler, where there is a church on every corner, you sometimes forget that most of the population of the world has no access to the gospel message. That’s why we are engaged in taking the gospel to the ends of the earth.

I don’t believe anyone should have the right to hear the gospel twice until everyone has had the chance to hear it once. So, once we have shared the gospel with our neighborhood, we start branching out to other ethnic groups. I believe almost everyone in East Texas has access to a Bible and to the message of the Gospel, that’s why we move outward with the message.

Just before He ascended into Heaven, Jesus said, “But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.” (Acts 1:8 NIV)

As we go, we share the good news with all ethnic groups. And then He said we are to baptize them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Why do we baptize believers? Because Jesus commanded us to do it! Romans 6 tells us that baptism is a powerful symbol of the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus. Baptism represents our death and burial—but the only mourner is the devil, because it symbolizes the death of the old person you were before Jesus saved you. And when you come up out of the water it’s a picture of the new life you have in Christ.

Baptism identifies you with Jesus and with other followers of Jesus. At the beginning of His public ministry, Jesus was baptized by John. If there was ever a person who didn’t need to be baptized, it was Jesus. But He did it to set an example for us. So, when we’re baptized, we identify with him. If I see you wearing a Dallas Cowboy jersey, you are identifying with your team. Baptism is the identifying jersey for a follower of Jesus Christ. It shows everyone that you are on the Jesus Team.

At this point I hope you’re asking yourself, “What is my part in the Great Commission?” I’m so glad you asked. There is something that everyone can do to be a part of God’s Divine Assignment.

A. Pray for more missionaries.

In 1853, when Hudson Taylor started out from England for China, there were less than 100 missionaries taking the Gospel to the people who had never heard. There are about 100,000 evangelical missionaries from all different evangelical denominations. But that’s not enough. We need to pray for our missionaries, but we also need to ask God for more missionaries.

Years ago, Lanny Wolfe wrote a powerful song entitled “My House is Full.” The lyrics say: “There is peace and contentment in my Father’s house today. Lots of food on the table and no one is turned away. There is singing and laughter as the hours pass by. But a hush calms the

singing as the Father sadly cries, “My house is full, but my field is empty. Who will go and work for Me today? It seems my children all want to stay around my table, but no one wants to work my field. No one wants to work my field.”

I want us to stop right now and pray for more missionaries. “Lord, I know you love every one of those people who are lost without Christ. I pray, I ask you, Father, to even look down into this group is in this room right now and call out some of these people to be laborers in your harvest. I ask you, Father the Lord of the harvest, to send more laborers to reach these people for you. I pray this in Jesus’ name, amen.”

B. Love the lost people you know.

God has placed people in your sphere of influence who don’t know Jesus. They are lost without Christ. They may be coworkers, neighbors, teammates, or school friends. There are many different ways you can love them to Jesus. You can show them the love of Christ in the way you treat them, and you can pray for their salvation. And at the right time, God will give you the words to say to them.

Of course, you expect me to talk about Jesus—that’s my calling and my joy. But sometimes people who are aren’t trained feel afraid about saying the wrong thing. Your best conversation is your personal testimony. Just share what a difference Jesus has made in your life. And I have had hundreds of people tell me about talking to someone about Jesus and they all say something like this, “I really didn’t know what I was going to say, but once we started talking, I found myself saying things that I didn’t even know that I knew.” That’s God speaking through you. Jesus promised the disciples that there would be times that they needed His help, and He promised to put His words in their mouths. That’s a cool experience, but you never get to experience it until you just launch out into a spiritual conversation. Then you raise the sail of faith and the breath and wind of the Holy Spirit will propel you through the conversation.

Sometimes we are reluctant to talk to people about Christ because we don’t want to offend them. A while back I watched an amazing video of Penn Jillette online that someone sent me. He’s half of the Penn and Teller act in Las Vegas. Penn isn’t a Christian, he claims to be an atheist. In the video he talks about how after one of his shows a man gave him a Gideon New Testament and asked him to read it. Penn wasn’t offended. In fact, he recorded a video in which he said, “If you believe that there’s a heaven and a hell; and people could be going to hell; or not getting eternal life or whatever, and you think it’s not really worth telling them this because it would make it socially awkward; and atheists who think people shouldn’t proselytize...just leave me alone, keep your religion to yourself. How much do you have to hate somebody to not proselytize them? How much do you have to hate someone to believe that everlasting life is possible, and not tell him or her that? I mean if I believed, without a shadow of a doubt, that a truck was coming at you and you didn’t believe it? And that truck was bearing down on you? There’s a certain point where I tackle you. And this is MORE important than that. I still think religion does a lot of bad stuff, but, man, that was a good man who gave me that book. That’s all I wanted to say.”

So, let me quote this self-professed atheist and ask you, “If you believe there is a Heaven and a Hell how much do you have to HATE a person you know by not telling them about what you believe.” Will you ask God to put someone on your heart right now who needs to see the love of God in your life directed toward them?

C. Invest financially in Missions.

Over the next few weeks, we’re going to be receiving our World Mission Offering. Our goal this year is \$1,000,000. That’s the largest goal we’ve ever had. I checked the latest holiday spending figures from last Christmas. The average amount that a person spent on Christmas gifts last year was \$983. Last year on Black Friday Americans spent a record \$5 billion in 24 hours. Then on Cyber Monday, Americans spent an additional \$6.59 billion. Compare that to mission support. Studies have shown that on average Christians give less than a penny a day for missions—that’s \$3.65 a year.

So, this season I want to do something different. Instead of focusing on Black Friday or Cyber Monday, I want to declare White Sunday as December 2 when everyone brings an extravagant gift to Jesus to support Missions. You can give before and after December 2, but I’m calling it White Sunday. So, get ready to give!

I think it is wonderful to give Christmas presents, so go ahead and shop until you drop. But here’s what I’d like for you to consider: Will you give your most expensive gift of the season to Jesus? In other words, figure out what you’re going to spend on everyone else, and then give an amount above that to Jesus through Missions. I know many of you do as my wife and I have done for years. We get gifts for the kiddos, but we don’t give Christmas gifts to each other. Instead the amount we might spend on each other, we give to missions. It sure makes Christmas a lot more special and there’s an added blessing for me and, probably other husbands, too. I don’t have to deal with the stress of the possibility that I didn’t give Cindy a great gift. Trust me, before we started doing this, I dropped the ball several times. So, I thank God that our gifts to each other are to the World Mission Offering!

During this time of year, it’s easy to allow generosity to fill your heart. Jesus said, “Give, and it will be given to you. A good measure—pressed down, shaken together, and running over—will be poured into your lap. For with the measure you use, it will be measured back to you.” (Luke 6:38 CSB) You can’t out-give God. Try getting into a giving contest with God sometime. You give a little, and He gives back a little more. You give a lot and He gives back a LOT more.

D. Pack your bags and go!

We have over 4,200 full-time missionaries sent by the International Mission Board of the Southern Baptist Convention. These are families and individuals who have heard God’s call to leave their home and go to a place around the world where people have not yet been engaged with the Gospel.

Most of these missionaries were sitting in a worship service much like today when the Holy Spirit said, “I want you to pack up and go to another city, another state, or another continent to tell people about me.” Forty years ago, the typical missionary was a preacher-type who was seminary trained and they went and started churches. Today our missionary force looks totally different. They are mostly young adults who have technical skills in computers, are teachers, engineers, or health care professionals. They must have a marketable skill in order to be accepted in foreign cultures. So maybe you got a degree that had nothing to do with theology, and it was God’s way of equipping you to be a missionary!

In addition to the 4,000 SBC missionaries who are part of the Southern Baptist Convention, Green Acres is providing direct support to 29 families or individuals who have packed their bags and moved to share the good news. Is God calling you to do that?

So, what is your part? Everyone can pray. Everyone can love lost people. Everyone can give something, some a little and some a lot. And some of you are hearing God’s call to leave your comfort zone to discover the adventure of being on mission for your Creator.

III. JESUS OFFERS US THE GREATEST ASSURANCE.

Jesus said, “And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.” So, if the good news is we aren’t in this alone. Jesus has promised that He will be with us in this task of reaching the nations.

Jesus was ascending to heaven before He said these words, how could He be with them? Simple. Ten days later He sent the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of Jesus who lives inside of all Christians. When Jesus was walking with the disciples He said, “I have been with you, but he will be IN you.”

So, how did these eleven men handle their commission? There were 120 Christians gathered on the day of Pentecost, but after Peter preached the Gospel, 3,000 additional believers were added to the church. Later in Acts we see that another 5,000 men were added. But in Acts 8 there is a great persecution against the church and they were scattered. Paul and the others took the Gospel throughout the Roman Empire. But all of them died martyr’s deaths. As Peter was being crucified upside down, I wonder if he thought, “We made a good try, but this is the end.”

Well, it wasn’t the end. It was the beginning. The blood of the martyrs became the seed of the faith and within the next two hundred years the church was finally legalized in Rome.

But frankly, because of the Dark Ages, the politics of the Catholic Church, and the spread of Islam, the church didn’t make many strides for the next 1700 years. But with the birth of the modern missionary movement, there has been great momentum over the last 100 years.

According to Fuller Theological seminary, 70% of the evangelization of the world has occurred in the last century.

At the beginning of the 20th Century about 2% of the world's people were practicing Christians. By 2010, that number grew to more than 12%. Christianity is the largest and fastest growing religion in the world. Advances in technology and transportation have allowed us to accelerate the delivery of the Gospel message. Every day 178,000 people are coming to faith in Christ.

However, we have a lot of catching up to do. Throughout history, the church missed several strategic opportunities. Think about the billions of people who live in China and India today. Did you know that if the church hadn't dropped the ball 800 years ago, China and India could be the epicenter of global Christianity?

Here's the true story from history. In 1266 Kublai Khan, grandson of Genghis Khan, controlled all the land from the Black Sea (Russia) to the Pacific Ocean, which included India and China. Kublai Khan was interested in Christianity. His uncle was a practicing Christian. Matteo Polo and his brother, Nicolo, met Kublai Khan and Khan had them deliver a letter to the Pope in Rome asking him to send 100 Christian missionaries. He said, "I will be baptized and all my barons will be baptized, and we shall have more Christians here than in the West."

The current Pope in Rome died before they returned, so they delivered the letter to Pope Gregory X. He wasn't interested in sending missionaries to this heathen ruler. Finally, the two Italians returned to Mongolia in 1271, taking a young Marco Polo with them and two Catholic friars. But these two friars soon dropped out from fear. It took them over 20 years to return to Kublai Khan. When he saw no missionaries he gave up on the idea of Christianity. Can you imagine what would be different today if 100 missionaries had arrived?

Can you imagine the difference in world history if China and India had become the center of Christianity, and they were sending out thousands of evangelical missionaries to places like the United States? But the church missed that opportunity.

Today, we stand at the brink of another similar opportunity. With the tools of technology and transportation, we could see the fulfillment of the Great Commission in our generation. We need prayers, people, and funds to forge ahead into these final areas of the world where people groups have never heard. Everybody has a part to play. Will you?

OUTLINE

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My part in God’s Divine Assignment

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- B. Love the lost people you know.
- C. Invest financially in Missions.
- D. Pack your bags and go!

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For the Joy...
Pastor David Dykes



*David O. Dykes, Pastor
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