

# Jesus Commissions His Disciples

**SESSION IN A SENTENCE:** Just before Jesus ascended to the Father, He commissioned the disciples to go to all the nations and share the gospel with the Spirit's power as they anticipate His return.

**BACKGROUND PASSAGES:** Matthew 28:16-20; Acts 1:1-11

Have you ever tried to complete an assignment without understanding why it mattered or what it would accomplish? Or how about following instructions without knowing what your actions would lead to? In both instances, your performance may have suffered from a lack of motivation without knowing the point of the activity or a lack of knowledge of how it should be done. Apart from understanding an activity's purpose and the means to achieve said purpose, there's no way to know whether you are actually hitting the mark and positively contributing to the whole. It's completely possible that you would end up spending a lot of time and energy on something that proved pointless and impractical.



When have you been asked to do something without knowing the "why"? How did it feel?

# Group Time

## Point 1: Jesus' disciples are to make disciples of all the nations (Matt. 28:16-20).

<sup>16</sup> The eleven disciples traveled to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had directed them. <sup>17</sup> When they saw him, they worshiped, but some doubted. <sup>18</sup> Jesus came near and said to them, "All authority has been given to me in heaven and on earth. <sup>19</sup> 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, <sup>20</sup> teaching them to observe everything I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age."

Jesus was clear and direct with His disciples, and subsequently with us, about the gospel mission, making it easy to understand the most important thing moving forward. For the "how," Jesus commissioned His disciples to teach and to baptize people. But the "what," in a sense, the *one* job of the believer is this: "Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations." Therefore, to follow Jesus and obey His Great Commission, we cannot merely know about Jesus; we must obey His marching orders and go make disciples.



What are some reasons believers struggle to obey and participate in the Great Commission?

*Authority.* Some people hear the word with a negative connotation, and not without cause. People in authority can have a tendency to abuse their authority. But not so with Jesus. His authority is divine, it is true, and it is loving. All throughout the Book of Matthew, the authority of Jesus is made clear (7:28-29; 9:6-8; 11:27). He not only has authority over nature, disease, sin, and death, He has received authority over all heaven and earth. So when we go out to make disciples of all nations, we go with His authority. The effectiveness of our discipleship is not a direct result of how much we do; rather, it's fueled and rooted in who Jesus is and what He's already done and His unending presence with us.



### Voices from Church History

"Jesus approached them and said, "All authority in heaven and earth has been given to me." This authority was given to one who had just been crucified, buried in a tomb, laid dead and afterwards had arisen. Authority was given to him in both heaven and earth so that he who once reigned in heaven might also reign on earth through the faith of his believers."<sup>1</sup>

—Jerome (c. 347-420)

## Point 2: Jesus' disciples are to be His witnesses through the Spirit's power (Acts 1:4-8).

<sup>4</sup> While he was with them, he commanded them not to leave Jerusalem, but to wait for the Father's promise. "Which," he said, "you have heard me speak about; <sup>5</sup> for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit in a few days."

<sup>6</sup> So when they had come together, they asked him, "Lord, are you restoring the kingdom to Israel at this time?" <sup>7</sup> He said to them, "It is not for you to know times or periods that the Father has set by his own authority. <sup>8</sup> But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come on you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."

Jesus died and rose again, in part, to grant His disciples the Holy Spirit (John 16:7). Without the Holy Spirit, our witness as believers is powerless. Witnessing is not something the church does alone; the Spirit goes before the church in preparation and empowers her witness in the presentation of the gospel. Thanks be to God that we are not on our own in this mission Jesus has called us to. Thanks be to God that He cares more about the lost in our cities, towns, and neighborhoods than we ever could. And thanks be to God for the incredible gift of the Holy Spirit.

**Work of the Holy Spirit in the Life of the Christian:** The Spirit's work in the life of a Christian begins in the work of \_\_\_\_\_ in bringing a person to faith in Christ and is continued through the work of sanctification in helping the Christian to become progressively more like \_\_\_\_\_ throughout the course of his or her life. He also \_\_\_\_\_ and indwells believers, intercedes on their behalf, and \_\_\_\_\_ them with special gifts for the service of God's \_\_\_\_\_.

Jesus called His disciples to be His witnesses—through the Spirit's power—everywhere in the world. By extension, Jesus has called believers today to bear witness about Him to our loved ones, our enemies, those "other" people, and those we don't know to the ends of the earth. This task belongs to every follower of Christ regardless of education and experience, past background or present situation. But only through the Spirit's power can we hope to pursue and fulfill the Great Commission.



How does the Holy Spirit help believers to pursue and fulfill the Great Commission?

### Point 3: Jesus' disciples are to anticipate His return (Acts 1:9-11).

<sup>9</sup> After he had said this, he was taken up as they were watching, and a cloud took him out of their sight. <sup>10</sup> While he was going, they were gazing into heaven, and suddenly two men in white clothes stood by them. <sup>11</sup> They said, "Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking up into heaven? This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come in the same way that you have seen him going into heaven."

Jesus' **resurrection** and subsequent **ascension** are not peripheral matters; they are absolutely central to the Christian faith. In fact, if they didn't happen, our faith would be meaningless and powerless. But they did happen! Witnesses saw the resurrected Jesus; they also ate with Him, touched Him, laughed with Him, and learned from Him. Furthermore, after rising from the dead and appearing to more than five hundred people (1 Cor. 15:5-8), Jesus ascended into heaven, where He would send the Holy Spirit to dwell in His disciples. But He didn't just float away—He ascended to sit on His throne at the right hand of God the Father (Acts 2:32-35).



What are some ways we can honor King Jesus, who rose from the dead and ascended into heaven?

Just as Jesus ascended in power and glory, His disciples received the promise that He will **return** in the same manner. While no one other than God the Father knows when Jesus will return (Matt. 24:36), we must recognize that His return is imminent and could happen at any time. But as the angels told the disciples, we cannot be paralyzed while looking to heaven; we have a mission to serve our risen and enthroned King while we eagerly await His return.



What will it look like for believers to live in light of Jesus' ascension and His imminent return?



# Daily Study

## Day 1: Read Matthew 28:16-20

What doubts do you have about Christianity? Do you have questions that have gone unanswered? There is nothing wrong with questions—in fact, our faith is strengthened when we take the time to wrestle through our questions and find answers. But here we see that even some followers of Jesus—who were in the physical presence of Jesus—had doubts. What’s incredible, though, is that their doubts did not cause Jesus to turn away; instead, He chose to come near.

If you have questions that have gone unanswered, it’s highly likely that the people in your life whom God wants you to share the gospel with also have unanswered questions. So what if, instead of being hard on yourself and thinking you’re disqualified from doing evangelism because of your doubts, you took the time to wrestle through them? And what if while you’re in the process of wrestling through your doubts, God was actually preparing you to share the gospel and make disciples of all nations, beginning with the people presently in your life?

 When you’re being honest, what are the foremost questions you have about Christianity?

### Voices from the Church

“Evangelism and discipleship are two oars attached to the same boat. With only one oar in the water, you will row in a circle. Both oars are required to navigate in a straight line to reach your destination. We need evangelism and we need discipleship to carry out the Great Commission. The gospel is received through evangelism and then lived out through ongoing discipleship.”<sup>3</sup>

—Robby Gallaty

## Day 2: Read Luke 24:44-53

If you ever have a hard time understanding the Scriptures, don't worry; you're not the only one. In fact, as we read in this passage, even the disciples experienced this. The advantage that we have over the disciples is that we no longer have to be physically in the presence of Jesus to have our heart and mind opened to understand the Scriptures. After Jesus ascended into heaven, He sent the Holy Spirit to empower us and fill us with His presence. So, the great news is that God's presence is with us always and continually!

The next time you open up the Scriptures, start by asking God to open your heart and mind to both understand and apply the Scriptures through the power and presence of the Holy Spirit. In fact, you should do this right now and before re-reading today's passage.



In what ways do we have a greater advantage in our reading of the Bible than the disciples did during the first century?

## Day 3: Read Acts 1:1-3

To be an eyewitness of the resurrected Jesus would have been a surreal experience. What are you supposed to do, after all, when you're hanging out with someone who was no longer dead but now alive and glorified? You might try to stick your finger through the holes where the nails went through. Or maybe you would speak with Jesus about His apparent ability to teleport from place to place.

However you would have opted to act around Jesus, we should take note that He is not some fairy tale. He is not a myth. He is not a fictional character that a group of religious leaders conjured up. In fact, the early believers would have had nothing to gain by pretending these events happened. Rather, it's a historical fact that He lived, died, rose from the dead, and then appeared to more than five hundred eyewitnesses over a forty-day period before ascending to heaven. This is how Luke, both a physician and the author of this book, wanted to set the stage for the rest of the book. He wanted his readers to understand that the Book of Acts is a continuation of the Gospels, intended to provide the story of what happened in the lives of the early believers after Jesus' ascension to heaven.



How does Jesus' spending time with His disciples after rising from the dead help you to see the resurrection as a historical fact?

## Day 4: Read Acts 1:4-8

The Holy Spirit is as much God as Jesus is God and the Father is God. Why is it, though, that the Holy Spirit often feels like the neglected One? If you have not studied about the Holy Spirit and do not know the distinct ministry of the Holy Spirit, you are missing out. You are failing to learn more deeply about the very One who empowers you to live the Christian life.

To live the Christian life entails living an empowered life through the Holy Spirit because all who belong to Christ also possess the Spirit of Christ (Rom. 8:9). In other words, the Holy Spirit who empowered Jesus throughout His ministry on earth is the same Holy Spirit who empowered the disciples in the early church and empowers us today. Persuasive preaching and evangelism can be helpful to point people to God, but without the power of the Holy Spirit, it's ultimately ineffective. Only the Holy Spirit has the power to change hearts and move people from darkness to light.



What are some reasons we should consider the Holy Spirit as equally God with the Father and the Son and therefore worthy of our praise and worship?

## Day 5: Read Acts 1:9-11

If Jesus came back today in the same way He was taken to heaven, what would your response be? If He were to return today, what would He say to you? What would He say about your priorities, the decisions you made in the last 48 hours, and what your plans were going to look like in the next 48 hours?

Jesus' return is imminent. As Jesus said, no one knows the specific day or the hour other than God the Father (Matt. 24:36). Yet the fact is Jesus' return can happen at any time. So how can you live today in light of this truth? What needs to change about your priorities and your schedule so that His return sparks joy rather than shame in your heart? Our faith should lead us to pray, "Come, Lord Jesus, come," rather than, "Just another day! Not yet, Lord!"



Does Jesus' imminent return spark joy or shame in your heart? Why?



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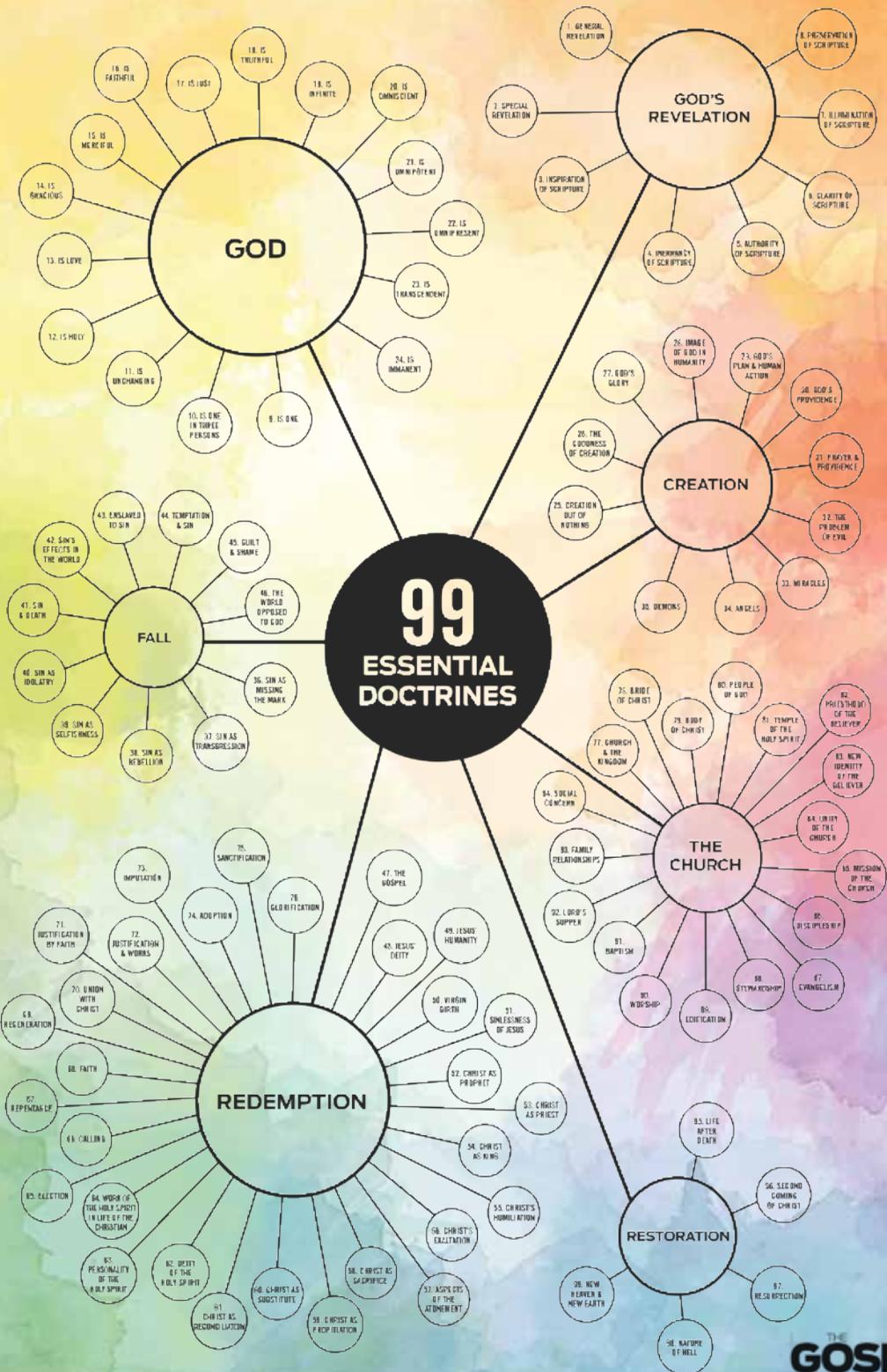
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# Jesus the Savior

Jesus came to inaugurate God's eternal kingdom on earth. To prepare people for that kingdom, He taught parables. Jesus was a masterful teacher who taught the truth and completely embodied His teaching, even when the truth turned people away. He also performed miracles, including raising people from the dead.

Jesus came into the world to save sinners. By virtue of His perfect life in obedience to His Father, He was able to stand in our place and take the punishment that we deserve for our sin—death. By the plan of God, carried out at the hands of sinful men, Jesus the Savior drank the cup of God's wrath while being crucified on a cross. He gave His life so that we might live.

As the risen King, Jesus appeared to His followers on numerous occasions and commissioned the citizens of His kingdom. The risen King then ascended to heaven where He reigns even now at the right hand of the Father, yet He is still with His followers on their gospel mission through the Holy Spirit.

## What's Next?

### WINTER 2020-21

#### Volume 10: The Mission Begins

*The Holy Spirit Comes (Acts; Epistles)*

*Fundamentals of the Faith (Acts; Epistles)*

*New Life in Christ (Acts; Epistles)*

### SPRING 2021

#### Volume 11: The Church United

*Living Like Jesus (Acts; Hebrews)*

*The Sent Church (Acts; Epistles)*

*Don't Forget (Acts; Epistles)*

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