

38 Go Because He Says So

“Then Jesus came to them and said, ‘All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations. . . .’” (Matthew 28:18-19a)

For years I have said that my passion is for the lost—for those who are dying without Christ. Whether in my personal life or as a leader within the church, I have sought ways to keep this as my primary passion. Then recently, I took a closer look at Matthew 28:18-19:

“All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations. . . .”

Many are familiar with this Great Commission. But do we know what should compel us to carry it out? I have always assumed it was because of our love for the lost, our concern that without Christ people will spend an eternity in Hell without Him, but this is not the basis He gives for the Great Commission. He says, *“All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go. . . .”*

Jesus certainly wants our hearts to be filled with love for the lost. This, however, is not the primary motivator He gives for us to reach out with the saving message of the Gospel. His Lordship is what should compel us. Nothing less. All authority belongs to Him, and He commands us to do this.

Jesus has come through the crucifixion and the three days in the grave as the Victor! Luther’s words express this so well:

“I believe that Jesus Christ, true God, begotten of the Father from eternity, and also true man, born of the Virgin Mary, is my Lord, who has redeemed me, a lost and

condemned person, purchased and won me from all sins, from death, and from the power of the devil; not with gold or silver, but with His holy, precious blood and with His innocent suffering and death, that I may be His own and live under Him in His kingdom and serve Him in everlasting righteousness, innocence and blessedness” (Luther’s Small Catechism p. 14).

His blood has not only freed me from my sin, the fear and punishment of death and the power of the devil—His blood has made me His own. “That I may be His own and live under Him in His kingdom and serve Him. . . .” He is my Lord. He has the right to ask of me whatever He wishes. I am His slave.

The disciples understood this on that day of His Ascension. Scripture records for us this moment immediately before He gave them the Great Commission:

“Then the eleven disciples went to Galilee to the mountain where Jesus had told them to go. When they saw him, they worshiped him; but some doubted” (Matthew 28:16-17).

Not everyone that day was convinced. But, those who understood knew who stood before them. In response they worshipped. Then Jesus said, *“All authority in heaven and earth has been given to me. Therefore go. . . .”* Those who worship Christ as Lord must also be willing to hear Him say, “I have authority over your life; here is what I now want you to do in response.”

My passion continues to be for the lost, for those who will spend an eternity in Hell without Christ. The “aha moment” for me is in recognizing a greater, more abiding passion—I want to live my life in response to His authority over me. I want to be His servant and no one else’s. My love for the lost is rooted in a first love for Jesus.

There are many men and women of faith who I admire and respect. Many of those have blessed my life directly. Some I have never met and yet their lives are such a witness and inspiration to me. One whom I never met but will someday meet in heaven is Dr. Bill Bright, founder of Campus Crusade for Christ. I am moved by his words:

“My life’s message is to be a slave of Jesus. And all that it involves. Love your master, trust your master, and obey your master. Obviously, I’m a son of God, heir of God, joint-heir with Christ, and if He was described as a slave—Paul, and Peter and the other apostles were slaves—this to me is the highest privilege any one could know. I evaluate everything I do in light of what He wants me to do. I try to relate every move, every day, in light of how I can help fulfill His great commission and fulfill His commandments.”

Responding to the Great Commission first out of obedience and love for Jesus rather than the needs of the lost will have an effect on my daily walk. When my response to the Great Commission is rooted first in obedience to His authority, then my life’s mission will reflect His own. The primary reason that Jesus came to this earth was not His love for you and me. It was not even so that He could die on the cross or rise from the grave. The primary reason that Jesus came to this earth was out of obedience to His Father. The result of that obedience was that He would die on the cross and be raised on the third day. Within that obedience there was, of course, His love for you and me. Clearly, though, His first love and passion was to follow His Father’s will.

I tend to so often focus on the loving Jesus that I diminish His primary motivation and purpose—obedience to His Father:

“‘My food,’ said Jesus, ‘is to do the will of him who sent me and to finish his work’” (John 4:34).

“... but the world must learn that I love the Father and that I do exactly what my Father has commanded me” (John 14:31).

“Then He said, ‘Here I am, I have come to do your will.’ He sets aside the first to establish the second” (Hebrews 10:9).

Remember how as a little boy Jesus upset his mother and earthly father when they could not find Him? Even then, there was a greater love within Him, guiding His steps: “‘Why were you searching for me?’ he asked. ‘Didn’t you know I had to be in my Father’s house?’” (Luke 2:49).

The second way that responding to the Great Commission out of obedience and love for Jesus will impact my walk is that it will give me strength and guidance. There are many times in our lives that the expectations and needs of other people will tug at our hearts. What is the guiding principle that determines what we say yes to and what we turn away? The answer rests in living our lives before an audience of One.

The demands of a hurting and hungry world were always before Jesus. How did He know when to say yes and when to say no? Henri Nouwen offers this thought:

“In the lonely place Jesus finds the courage to follow God’s will and not his own; to speak God’s words and not his own; to do God’s work and not his own. He reminds us constantly, ‘I can do nothing by myself . . . my aim is to do not my own will, but the will of him who sent me’ (John 5:30). And again, ‘The words I say to you I do not speak as from myself; it is the Father, living in me, who is doing this work’ (John 14:10)” (1974, p.14).

I am under His command to make disciples as I go along my way. I do this in obedience to Him and with love for those to whom I give witness. Even more important, though, is that my witness flows out of my first love for Him. This, in the end, will be the most winsome part of my witness. People will sense and see this, just as they will hear the witness I offer.

I am coming to see one other benefit to viewing the Great Commission from this perspective of obedience to His authority: Where I go or to whom I go is not as significant as making sure that He is the one who directs my goings. Remember the moment with Jesus and Peter on the beach? No sooner have they unpacked all the baggage of the last few days than this conversation is recorded:

“Peter turned and saw that the disciple whom Jesus loved was following them . . . When Peter saw him, he asked, ‘Lord what about him?’ Jesus answered, ‘If I want him to remain alive until I return, what is that to you? You must follow me’” (John 21:20-22).

It is so easy to become concerned with what God asks others to do, comparing our position in life with theirs. Keeping in mind that our response to the Great Commission is a matter of obedience frees me from getting all hung up as to whether someone is more passionate than me or more successful than me. It is not about me and what I accomplish in life. It is about His will for my life as His servant.

“All authority in heaven and earth has been given to me. Therefore go. . . .” As you are going into the day and week ahead of you, go as a person under authority. As you do, your mission will be a reflection of His; there will be the guidance as to when to say yes and when to say no; and there will be a lot less concern about what others are being asked to do in life. You will find that being His servant is the most freeing thing that you will experience in life.

Prayer: Jesus, You are my Lord. You have all authority over me. Show me what you want me to do. Give me the power by your Spirit to carry it out. I am your servant.
Amen.

Challenge: Is there anywhere in your life that God is waiting for you to submit yourself to His authority? Ask Him for His help in turning this over to Him.

Scripture Reading: John 21

From the Book of Concord: “For our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ is our only teacher; concerning him this weighty command was given from heaven to all human beings, ‘Hunc audite’ (‘listen to him’) [Matt. 17:5]. He was not a mere human being or angel. He was not only truthful, wise, and powerful. He is the eternal truth and Wisdom itself, and almighty God. He knows very well what to say and how to say it, and he can accomplish through his power everything that he has said and promises, and can make it happen, as he says, ‘Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away’ [Luke 21:33], and, ‘All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me’ [Matt. 28:18]” (Formula of Concord, Solid Declaration, Article VII: Holy Supper, p. 600.43)