

2. The Great Commission: Mark 16:15-16 and Luke 24:4-48

Mark 16:15-16

15 He said to them, "Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation. 16 Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned."

In Mark's account, the Lord is focusing on what the apostles are to do: "Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation;" and what the hearers are to do: "16 Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned." The end result is that they will be saved. *All the world* and *all creation* in Mark and *all nations* in Matthew 28:18-20 make the great commission applicable to every person who is to ever live. At the sermon in Acts 2:5 there were people from the entire world: "Now there were staying in Jerusalem God-fearing Jews from every nation under heaven." Paul preached the scope of the Lord's commission in Titus 2:11, "For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men."

The Lord specifies the method and the message. The method, preaching, and teaching in Matthew's account are synonymous (words meaning the same but with a different slant). *Preach* focuses on the one speaking the message and means *to proclaim or to publish abroad*. Teaching focuses on speaking the message and means *to instruct*. The Lord and the New Testament writers specify the certainty of the method as one ordained of God (see above comments on John 6:44-46). Paul wrote of this certainty and necessity in Rom 10:14-15, "How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them? 15 And how can they preach unless they are sent? As it is written, "How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!" Paul further endorsed God's method for spreading the gospel in 1 Cor 1:21-22, "It was God's good pleasure through the foolishness of the preaching to save them that believe." ASV.

The Lord's message is the gospel. Where in Matthew's account the Lord had said, "Teaching them all things that I have commanded you," here he describes the message as the "good news." Other versions say, "Gospel." The *good news* as the *gospel* becomes the word to designate the message. Paul defined the gospel in 1 Cor 15:1-7:

15:1 Now, brothers, I want to remind you of the gospel I preached to you, which you received and on which you have taken your stand. 2 By this gospel you are saved, . . . 3 For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, 4 that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, 5 and that he appeared to Peter, and then to the Twelve.

The gospel saves; the gospel is the word preached; the gospel is the death, burial, resurrection and appearance of Christ—all of these define the gospel clearly and permanently. Paul added in Rom 1:16, "I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes." To change the gospel is destroy its power. If either an angel or man changes the gospel, their fate is eternal condemnation (Gal 1:6-9).

In Mark's account, the Lord states clearly, "Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved." The Lord requires belief and baptism for salvation. All three—belief, baptism, and salvation—are clearly defined. *Believes* and its variants—*faith*, *believe*, and *belief*—are nouns and verbs coming from the same root word. The Hebrew writer gave specificity to the words in Heb 11:1-2, "Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see." The necessity of belief in conversion cannot be doubted, "And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him." Heb 11:5. John 3:16 tells what we must believe, "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life." Paul explains how one comes to believe in Rom 10:13-14, "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved. 14 How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them?"

Baptism is an element of the great commission in Mark's account here and in Matthew's account above. In addition to definitions given by Paul, there is illustrative evidence of the method used. When John baptized Jesus, John clearly immersed the Lord in Matt 3:16: "As soon as Jesus was baptized, he went up out of the water." Philip likewise immersed the eunuch in Acts 8:38-39: "Then both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water and Philip baptized him. 39 When they came up out of the water." In addition to these clear examples Paul described the act of baptism as a burial in Col 2:12: "Having been buried with him in baptism and raised with him through your faith in the power of God, who raised him from the dead." To fulfill the Lord's teaching in his commission, we must baptize by immersion and in water. This study will show that the converts in Acts followed this teaching exactly.

In this account of the Lord's commission, the end of belief and baptism was salvation. Matthew's account and its fulfillment show that the saved became disciples and the saved were added to the church daily (Matt 28: 19-20; Act 2:41; Acts 2:47). Salvation and the saved are in Christ according to Peter in Acts 4:12, "Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved." The method that the Lord commanded in his commission and the purpose combine in Paul's teaching in Rom 6:3-7:

3 Or don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? 4 We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life.

5 If we have been united with him like this in his death, we will certainly also be united with him in his resurrection. 6 For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin— 7 because anyone who has died has been freed from sin.

Peter also combined salvation and baptism in 1 Peter 3:21-22:

21 and this water symbolizes baptism that now saves you also – not the removal of dirt from the body but the pledge of a good conscience toward God. It saves you by the resurrection of Jesus Christ, 22 who has gone into heaven and is at God's right hand – with angels, authorities, and powers in submission to him.

Mark's account of the Lord's commission concludes with a description on the worst sort of punishment for those who do not believe on him and his word: "Whoever does not believe will be condemned." Belief in this account of the commission goes hand in hand with obedience:

Now to him who is able to establish you by my gospel and the proclamation of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery hidden for long ages past, 26 but now revealed and made known through the prophetic writings by the command of the eternal God, so that all nations might believe and obey him. Rom 16:25-26.

Peter also concurred that the end of the commission was eternal salvation in 2 Peter 1:10-11, "For if you do these things, you will never fall, 11 and you will receive a rich welcome into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ." In Mark's account the Lord, himself, brings us to an emphatic *either or* as regards our own salvation.

Luke 24:46-48

"This is what is written: The Christ will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, 47 and repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. 48 You are witnesses of these things."

Luke records the commission with an emphasis on the progressive and continuous nature of what the Lord expects to happen. The gospel message of good news is presented in the same terms that we have seen Paul use in 1 Cor 15:1-4 above. The death, burial, and resurrection are explicit in "the Christ will suffer and rise from the dead." In Luke's account, the action required of the believer, repentance, and the results of that action, forgiveness of sins, are vital parts of the gospel message that the Lord expected to be preached.

This analysis has already covered definitions of *gospel*, *preached* and *all nations*. The new elements added by

the Lord in Luke's account are *repentance* and *remission of sins*. Peter combined these same two elements of the commission in the command that he gave those who cried out and asked what to do. In Acts 2:38, Luke recorded, "Peter replied, "Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins."

Even before the Lord gave his commission, he preached the importance of repentance. He said in Luke 5:32, "I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance." In Acts 5:29-32, Peter once again combined repentance and the forgiveness of sins:

"We must obey God rather than men! 30 The God of our fathers raised Jesus from the dead – whom you had killed by hanging him on a tree. 31 God exalted him to his own right hand as Prince and Savior that he might give repentance and forgiveness of sins to Israel. 32 We are witnesses of these things, and so is the Holy Spirit, whom God has given to those who obey him."

Paul defined repentance and how it occurs in 2 Cor 7:8-10:

9 yet now I am happy, not because you were made sorry, but because your sorrow led you to repentance. For you became sorrowful as God intended and so were not harmed in any way by us. 10 Godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation and leaves no regret, but worldly sorrow brings death.

Just being sorry is not enough to save one. The sorrow must be Godly sorrow that is the sorrow leading to repentance, and repentance leading to salvation.

Peter spoke of this same kind of repentance in Acts 3:19-20 when he preached, "Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord, 20 and that he may send the Christ, who has been appointed for you – even Jesus." Thus true repentance starts with Godly sorrow and a commitment to leave sin and follow the Lord, and ends with actually turning to God by doing what the Lord commands – no exceptions.

This true repentance leads to salvation and the forgiveness of sins. Peter wrote in 2 Peter 3:9, "The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance." Paul agreed with Peter Acts 17:29-31:

30 In the past God overlooked such ignorance, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent. 31 For he has set a day when he will judge the world with justice by the man he has appointed. He has given proof of this to all men by raising him from the dead.

The last element of the Lord's commission in Luke's account is *forgiveness of sins*. Forgiveness of sins is central to the eternal purpose of God.

In addition to its inclusion as an element of the Lord's commission, the Lord related the forgiveness of sins to the blood of the New Covenant in Matt 26:27-29: "Drink from it, all of you. 28 This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. 29 I tell you, I will not drink of this fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I drink it anew with you in my Father's kingdom." Peter included the forgiveness of sins as the result of obeying the gospel in Acts 2:38, Peter replied, "Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins." Paul related the forgiveness of sins as the reward for winning the great struggle to save us from darkness and power of Satan in Acts 26:17-18: "17 I will rescue you from your own people and from the Gentiles. I am sending you to them 18 to open their eyes and turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, so that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me."

Conclusion

The Lord's commission tells fully what the Lord expected of the apostles and of those who hear the word. The apostles were to go and preach or teach the gospel to the whole creation. The hearers were to believe, repent, and be baptized. The immediate results were that the hearers became disciples and the Lord was with them always, even to the end of the world. The eternal results were the forgiveness of sins and salvation. This study will show that the apostles and the hearers did just what the Lord asked them to do.