

The Exalted Christ's Charge to His Church

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Bible Text: Matthew 28:16-20
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For our Scripture reading tonight, let's turn to the Gospel of Matthew 28. Matthew 28, and we'll be reading there verses 16 through 20. So Matthew 28, starting with verse 16.

16 Then the eleven disciples went away into Galilee, into a mountain where Jesus had appointed them. 17 And when they saw him, they worshipped him: but some doubted. 18 And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. 19 Go ye therefore, and teach 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 things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. Amen.

For our confession of faith, let's turn to Article 26 of the Belgic Confession that you can find on page 17 in the back of your Psalter. One of the reasons that the Lord Jesus ascended was to sit on the throne as an interceder who prays for each of his own by name in every circumstance of life. One on the throne who at the same time is touched with the feeling of our weaknesses.

Article 26, page 17.

We believe that we have no access unto God, but alone through the only Mediator and Advocate, Jesus Christ the righteous, who therefore became man, having united in one person the divine and human natures, that we men might have access to the divine Majesty, which access would otherwise be barred against us. But this Mediator, whom the Father has appointed between him and us, ought in no wise to affright us [or frighten us] by his majesty, or cause us to seek another according to our fancy. For there is no creature either in heaven or on earth who loves us more than Jesus Christ; who, though he was in the form of God, yet made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a man, and of a servant for us, and was made like unto his brethren in all things. If then we should seek for another Mediator, who would be well affected towards us, whom

could we find, who loved us more than he, who laid down his life for us, even when we were his enemies? And if we seek for one who has power and majesty, who is there that has so much of both as he who sits at the right hand of his Father, and who has all power in heaven and on earth? And who will sooner be heard than the own well beloved Son of God? Therefore it was only through distrust that this practice of dishonoring, instead of honoring the saints, was introduced, doing that, which they never have done, nor required, but have on the contrary steadfastly rejected according to their bound duty, as appears by their writings. Neither must we plead here our unworthiness; for the meaning is not that we should offer our prayers to God on account of our own worthiness but only on the account of the excellency and worthiness of the Lord Jesus Christ, whose righteousness is become ours by faith. Therefore the apostle, to remove this foolish fear, or rather distrust from us, justly says, that Jesus Christ was made like unto his brethren in all things, that he might be a merciful and faithful High Priest, to make reconciliation for the sins of the people. For in that he himself has suffered, being tempted, he is able to help them that are tempted; and further to encourage us, he adds, seeing then that we have a great High Priest, that is passed into the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our profession. For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our weaknesses; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need. The same apostle says, having boldness to enter into the holiest, by the blood of Jesus; let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, etc. Likewise, Christ has an unchangeable priesthood, wherefore he is able also to save them to the uttermost, that come unto God by him, seeing he ever lives to make intercession for them. What more can be required? since Christ himself says, I am the way and the truth, and the life: no man comes unto the Father but by me. To what purpose should we then seek another advocate, since it has pleased God, to give us his own Son as our advocate? Let us not forsake him to take another, or rather to seek after another, without ever being able to find him; for God well knew, when he gave him to us, that we were sinners. Therefore according to the command of Christ, we call upon the heavenly Father through Jesus Christ our own Mediator, as we are taught in the Lord's prayer; being assured that whatever we ask of the Father in his name, will be granted to us.

After the preaching of the word of God, let us sing Psalter 49.

Beloved congregation of the Lord, the words of our text tonight are among the most well-known words of the Bible, so much so that we have even given them a name beyond chapter and verse. We call them the great commission. Perhaps, however, some of us might prefer to call it the difficult commission or even mission impossible. When you attempt to carry them out, you quickly discover that it can be the most demanding and

challenging thing you've ever tried to do and the fact that it is a challenging commission leads to the danger of it being neglected.

I heard a pastor recently preach a sermon on evangelism and his comment was that it hasn't gotten any easier for him than it was the first time to tell others about the Lord Jesus Christ and the danger is that you just let it go.

I was once at a Bible conference browsing the book table and I found two books whose titles drove home this point. The first book had as the title, "The Great Commission," in large black letters and what struck me was that the word "Great" was crossed out and then in red letters above them was penciled in "Everyday," so that the title as corrected now read, "The Everyday Commission." This underlines something for us that's very important, that we should not look at this great commission and think it involves only the great or those whom we might be tempted to call the great ones of the church, or great acts of service and self-denial and sacrifice for people like missionaries and evangelists, pastors.

Another book that struck me as I was browsing that book table conference was this, again the title, "The Great Commission," but this time the publisher had put a line through the word "C" in "Commission" so that the title now read, "The Great omission." Isn't this the command of Jesus Christ that Christians far too often neglect? Is it not a constant temptation to let it go? To first of all choose those commandments that give us immediate benefit, that protect us from what we think is immediate dangers or brokenness in our life and to leave this one to carry out? Too many Christians, one pastor has said, do evangelism by proxy, that is, we pray for and pay someone else to do it.

We need to be aware that we cannot fall into this danger. The church is not a social club who sponsors a few evangelists to do the work. The church is a lighthouse. Now, we may never be satisfied with shaking our heads from time-to-time at the world out there, for one of the main reasons why God gathers a church on earth rather than sweeping the saved instantly to heaven is that God wants his church on earth to be a missionary people in the dark night of sin and to rescue the wrecked, the ruined, the guilty and the failing.

And that is why we must look tonight at this parting charge that Jesus Christ gave his church so that we might be reminded of one of the main reasons for us being a church on earth. Our theme is this, "The Exalted Christ's Charge to His Church." It begins with a tremendous claim. It involves the great commission and it is made possible by a noteworthy promise. The exalted Christ's charge to his church. It begins with a tremendous claim. It involves a great commission and it is made possible by a noteworthy promise.

Congregation, the words of our text are not strictly spoken during the ascension of the Lord Jesus Christ, we know this because the Gospel of Luke tells us the ascension took place in the Mount of Olives and the Gospel of Matthew tells us that these words were spoken on another mountain in Galilee. And yet these words do fit tonight as we think of the ascension because this is how the Gospel of Matthew ends, that this is the purpose of

the resurrected, glorious Lord to produce a church that goes into all the world. We shouldn't think of the exaltation of Jesus Christ as separate parts, but his resurrection, his ascension, his being seated at the right hand of God and his coming again to judge the living and the dead are all simply parts of one great act of victorious redemption. It is the risen Lord who is ascending in triumph to the throne of God and it is as that Lord that Jesus gives his disciples a commission and through them he gives it to us.

This theme of worldwide evangelism is really the theme of just about everything Jesus says between his resurrection and his ascension. Now as we look at this great charge that God has given to you and to me, each of us, not just to us as a church, notice where the Lord Jesus begins and it's wonderful where he begins. He doesn't start with what we are, he doesn't start with what we are supposed to do, he doesn't start with our gifts and abilities or what we might feel is our lack thereof, he starts with who he is. The facts concerning him are the most important and this is liberating because it tells us that in carrying out God's work of commission in this world, our weaknesses, our limitations, our fears, are no obstacle to the success of this charge.

Look at the kinds of people to whom Jesus speaks. We're told in verse 16 that the eleven apostles meet him on a mountain in Galilee, and we might be tempted to think that as apostles, they're supermen rather than flesh and blood like we are, this is one of the ways in which we can try to push the charge off our laps, isn't it? By saying, "I'm not up to it. Leave it for the super-gifted, the extraordinary." Notice what the text tells us in verse 16: these eleven have seen, especially verses 16 and 17, they have seen the Lord a number of times, they've touched him, they've eaten with him, they've spoken to him and even then, some doubt.

What did they doubt? Why did they doubt? We're not told. It actually isn't important to be too specific. It doesn't mean, by the way, that they're unbelievers, it just means that their faith was still weak. And even as they kneel to worship this glorious God-man who is ascending into heaven, some of them are struggling with doubts in their hearts. With Christ visible in front of them. And it is to such people that Jesus Christ gives this great commission and charge.

Maybe you sit here tonight as someone who has doubts in your heart of hearts. Those doubts rise when you think of sharing the Gospel with others, they are even present when you sit in the sanctuary, when you worship, when you read your Bible and pray. You're assaulted by the doubts that questions, "Is this the word of God and is God real?" They make you feel weak and inadequate and you say, "How can someone who struggles with doubts be a witness? Surely God wouldn't call me to the task of evangelism in my own backyard? Or ask me to carry the Gospel to the ends of the earth?" And yet it is to such people that the Lord Jesus delivers these words. The only way such people can be motivated to carry it out is if the charge starts not with who they are but with who the one commissioning them is and then the charge is transformed from being mission impossible to being liberating privilege.

And Jesus knows them and that's why he starts the way he does. When they first see him, he's at a distance, possibly on a mountaintop. They are told to meet him there. They see him in resurrection glory and they fall down and worship before him and while they kneel, he approaches them until he stands right among them, and only then does he speak. His resurrection glory doesn't change how he relates to them. He is still Immanuel, God with us, and it is in the middle of, among his people that the charge he gives is possible because he is there.

Listen how he starts this charge, "All power is given unto me in heaven and on earth." You could also translate, "All authority is given in heaven and on earth." The Greek word here can mean either "power" or "authority." If you translate "power," the focus is on the ability to rule. If you translate "authority," the focus is on the right to rule. Both are essential and you can see how this is so if you stop to think about what happens if you have one but not the other. Power without right leads to bullying and tyranny. Might does not make right.

G. K. Chesterton, the Christian apologist, used the example of a rhinoceros in a restaurant, that everyone will agree that he has no authority or right to be there, but no one will deny that his power as he rages and butts his way around is great. Think of a policeman, he has the authority to enforce the law and yet the police cannot catch every crime against the law.

Jesus Christ has both the power and the right to rule. He has all power in heaven and on earth. There is not a corner of the entire universe of which he is not sovereign Lord, of which he is not in control. So when he sends us to the ends of the earth, he's not sending us beyond his reach. No one has more power than he. No one can block or veto his decisions or resist his rule. From the stars and planets in their orbit to the microscopic germs and the structure of our genetics.

All power is his and all right is also indisputably his for God the Father has exalted him and given him the name above every name, Philippians 2, as the reward for his finished work on the cross. And now he is exalted and he rules with this goal: until every knee bow and every tongue confess that Jesus is Lord. Until every Buddhist, every Hindu, every Muslim, every Canadian, every person you have ever met or heard or read about until you and I bend the knee and acknowledge him the King of all.

This is the message of the ascension. It is the coronation ceremony of the Lord Jesus Christ. He is crowned and what a tremendous blessing that brings to the church in the world. It means, for one thing, that the right of command is Christ's. As the sovereign King, it is his right to set before us his will for our lives and to expect from his church obedience to this great call. He speaks to you tonight as Judge, Lawgiver and Ruler of the universe.

What are the reasons people hesitate sometimes to carry out this command of God is that they're afraid of what other people will say, will do, or will think of them. People are big in their minds and God is small. Nowhere is this more apparent than when the subject of

evangelism comes up. It is so easy to love your feeling of comfort more than God's glory and the well-being of someone else. Is that right? Should we not be much more concerned about what God thinks of us? Should it be not much more important to us to know that the one with all authority in heaven and on earth commands this commission?

And when the church and when individuals fail to carry out this charge given by Christ, we are robbing the risen, ascended Lord of the glory that he deserves. Listen carefully now: not of his essential glory as the Son of God for no human being can make that greater or less, but of his declarative glory. What that means is this: the glory he gets by being praised and honored by others, and when we are slack in carrying out his commission, we are actually saying we don't care if he gets the glory that he deserves by having more people bow before him and acknowledge him as King already now. How can this be? In heaven, all bow before the throne and say, "Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive blessing and glory and honor!" Should we not long for this to be so on earth, too? That is the goal of the great commission.

But this sovereignty of Jesus Christ has another application for us. Sometimes people are pressed into evangelism by being put on a guilt trip, as if to feel sorry for poor God who can't get anything done without our help. A story was once told at an evangelism conference something like this: there was a train crash a couple of hundred years ago, many people were seriously injured. Among the passengers was a world famous British surgeon on vacation in India and as he walked along the tracks from one person to the next, he had a mounting sense of helplessness because he had none of his surgical instruments with him, and with clenched fist and jaw, he kept on muttering, "If only I had my instruments. If only I had my instruments." And the person making the speech gave this application: God looks at this world and sees people going lost forever and he has to rub his hands and say, "Oh, if only they would start caring about evangelism. If only I had my instruments." That is why you should go out and evangelize, to help God out.

That is a sickening insult to the majesty of the Lord Jesus Christ. The real Gospel goes like this: Jesus Christ is the ascended Lord of glory. All power is his in heaven and on earth and he can save people any way he chooses. He doesn't need you or me, but he delights to and chooses to use people. He wants to put the treasure of the Gospel and the glory of the Savior in clay pots, in fragile, weak human beings, and he gives us the great privilege of being his instruments in his sovereign hands as he does the work of converting sinners through the irresistible work of his poured out Holy Spirit, and he gives people the privilege of being witnesses of his work. He sends us simply to speak about him and he does the work of mercy that plucks people from destruction. That is glory. That is privilege. That is joy.

So what exactly, then, does the Lord Jesus expect from us as the sovereign Lord who does the work of saving the lost? Well, we consider this by looking at the words of command in the text for this is the second place. The parting charge of Jesus involves a great commission. Verse 19, this is Jesus' charge to his disciples and to his entire church in all centuries. Here you find in one verse, in fact, even just in one word, the goal towards which the church must put forth all its resources: time, energy, money, prayer.

This first starts with such a little word that has such tremendous implications: go. This word is so simple that it doesn't need any explanation and it requires so much work that the entire task of the church on earth is put in that one word. Go. Especially now that the Holy Spirit has been poured out. The disciples then had to wait in Jerusalem for ten short days between ascension and Pentecost, but after that the waiting period was over. Go, they were told. Go. Not sit. Not wait. Not take it easy. Not even simply pray, for prayer is very important, of course, but not if you use it as an excuse for not going.

"Go ye therefore, and teach all nations." Starting at your dinner table and in your own backyard and to the ends of the earth. There is not a country or town or person in this world over who Jesus Christ's sovereignty does not extend. There is not a place in the world off limits.

There is not a person in the church exempt from this command, though perhaps someone might be tempted to say, "Yeah, but Jesus sends his disciples. They're apostles. They're missionaries. Aren't these words most of all for them?" Jesus sends his apostles as leaders in his church and tells them to organize and require this of the entire church. You find this elsewhere in the New Testament. Peter, for example, in his first epistle says this, "Be ready always." He's speaking out to all believers, "Be ready always to give a reason for the hope that is in you."

A well-known historian of the Christian church, a man named Latourette, wrote this and I quote, "The Gospel is spread primarily through the witness of ordinary believers in the workplace and in the neighborhood rather than the work of professionals." Evangelism is not, first of all, the work of Ravi Zacharias, it is yours. Now, he can help you. He can really give you insight in how to answer and speak to people, but he's not your substitute.

The word "go" is active, not passive. One of the great dangers you and I can fall into is this: as long as we're nice, generous, kind people and good neighbors, then if someone wants to know something, they'll come and ask us why we're different and then we have to be ready to say so. Now, obviously a consistent lifestyle is important because your lifestyle can either turn people off or on to the Gospel, or at least make them willing to hear you or unwilling to hear you, but holy living is no substitute for going.

Jesus said, "Go." It's not complicated but it's hard, therefore, the most important thing in obeying this word is not so much to learn to do some activities now and then, though that can be very useful and helpful, but hearing and obeying the word "go" involves a lifestyle of evangelism, a mentality that looks for opportunity. Do you have that mentality? Do I?

Let me give you an example. One Western pastor was stranded in an airport in Russia with a group of believers from that country and a voice came over the intercom and said there was a three hour delay in the flight. The man from the West was annoyed and thought, "Oh, this is terrible." And the men from the East looked at their watches and said, "Okay, we're all going to scatter and start evangelizing. Meet you here in three

hours. I'll see you on the plane." Do you see the difference? That is the mindset the text is after, that you're always on call.

Do you go? I'm not asking if you pray for missionaries. That's very important, that's beautiful and it's good. I'm not asking if you pray for the coming of God's kingdom. We should. I'm not asking if you give money to support missions. We should. The question is not even if you think it's important to evangelize. The question is do you go?

You see, the word in our text is not "come." You come to church and you should, but you are to go into the world which is as close as your own backyard, the people you meet. When is the last time you spoke to someone about the Lord Jesus Christ? When is the last time you gently, compassionately and with conviction said something about him being the King of kings and the Judge of the living and the dead?

If you don't do this, then do you really believe that people are lost without God and without hope in the world? Do you really believe that Jesus is the King of kings, the Savior who is worthy of having all men come to him, who is able to convert everyone and anyone?

J. C. Ryle says it much better than I could. Listen to Ryle, "It is still the bound duty of every disciple of Christ to do all he can in person and by prayer to make others acquainted with Jesus. Where is our faith if we neglect this duty? How can you say you believe the Bible is the word of God if you don't say anything about it to other people? If you don't go, where is your love? How can you say you love others when you don't do what you can to pluck them out of the hell to which they're going? If you see a child on the street in front of an oncoming car, you shout out toward him. How much more when people all around you are heading to destruction without realizing it?" Ryle adds, "It may well be questioned whether a man knows the value of the Gospel itself if he does not desire to make it known in the world."

Now, that is a very convicting, unsettling set of questions. It bugs me to no end and I can tell by how you're listening tonight that it bugs you as well. It should, shouldn't it? The ascendant Lord says to you tonight, "Go," and it doesn't mean you have to go to the ends of the earth as a missionary, though it would be a privilege as a church to send out missionaries. It simply means that you should open your eyes and ears because there are people all over the place without Christ. The mission field has come to us. Modern Canada is full of pagans, full of people coming from all over the globe, full of all kinds of religions. Going has never been easier. You don't even need to leave your home to go. You can join an internet discussion group and share the Gospel there. Cornerstone Bible Institute or Redemption Prison Ministries, as they now call it, always needs people to correspond with inmates. There are opportunities all over the place.

The ascended Christ would have me ask you tonight how much of your time, energy and thought do you put into obeying this great commission? There is a war going on out there. Some of you have been in WWII or remember it, you know what happens in a war. Money and resources go to the battlefield. You do without at home if necessary to

support the men on the front lines. John Piper in his wonderful little book on missions tells the story of a ship named the Queen Mary. It's docked as a museum in California. It was used as a cruise ship in peacetime and it was a troop transport in wartime and you can go in today and look in two different rooms to see the difference. In the one room, you see the dining room as it was during when it was a cruise ship: dazzling amount of knives and forks and plates and napkins and cups, 15 or 16 items per setting. On the wartime side, you just got a simple metal tray with dents in it. During peacetime, one bed to a room. During wartime, the bunks were stacked eight high with barely enough room to turn over. During peacetime, 3,000 passengers. During wartime, 15,000.

Do you see the difference? You live as someone who is at war in the kingdom of God. I know we are allowed to enjoy what God gives us but we may not forget that we are in a battle zone. John Piper says it this way, "All talk of a Christian's right to live luxuriously as a child of the King in this atmosphere sounds hollow, especially when the King himself stripped for battle." "Yeah, but I don't dare," someone says. "I'm scared." Do you dare to face the ascended Lord at his return and tell him, "I didn't feel like doing this"? Jesus said, "Do not fear those who can kill the body but fear him who can cast soul and body into hell."

"I don't know how," you say. "I don't know what to say." Well, you're not the only one who struggles with that. In fact, even apostles and disciples sometimes struggled with that. If you read the New Testament, why do you think Paul asks the churches to pray for him, that he would have the wisdom to know how to open his mouth as he should?

And it needs to be done with wisdom and it needs to be done with tact and it needs to be done with kindness. A story is told of someone who became convicted that he should practice evangelism and so he got on the train the next day as he was going to work and he was all in a sweat about it and finally he turned in desperation to the man next to him and said, "Are you ready to die?" The man pulled the emergency brake on the train because he thought he was going to get mugged.

It takes wisdom and it takes learning again and again and again by experience, but if you really want to, there are so many ways in which to learn how to do so. There are some beautiful books, "Tell the Truth," by Will Metzger, including a beautiful outline in the back. A few simple things to memorize and remember. You can set up a Bible study this coming season about it. One Reformed pastor that was planting a church a few blocks from Ground Zero in New York City says that what he does is he has a whole bunch of 3x5 cards made up with Question and Answer 1 of the Heidelberg Catechism, your only comfort in life and death, and he always has a stack in his pocket wherever he goes and he gives that to people as a summary of biblical Christianity.

There are ways. You can use something like Christianity Explored, a beautiful video curriculum that you can follow with someone in the neighborhood or someone you meet or you can give that to go through, that in a very interactive and good way draws people to the Gospel.

But can it also be that God is calling someone listening tonight to full-time Christian service? "Go," he says. Young people, there is a dying world out there and people must hear the only good news that there is. God certainly calls everyone to evangelism and he may well be calling you to more. Would you pray and ask God if he might be calling you to spend all your time and effort on this important task?

But now we also need to unpack what this word "go" means and Jesus gives us a description of what this should mean. Notice very carefully what it does not say. It does not say you have to convert people to Christ. Sometimes people will come up to you and say, from a non-Reformed background, "How many people have you saved?" The answer is none. But you can say, "Let me tell you about how the Lord worked in the lives of others as I watched him as I spoke his word." It is the Holy Spirit's job to save people and that can take a whole load off your shoulders. It doesn't depend on you having just the right answer or saying it just the right way. Yes, we must do our best but in the end we are clay pots with weaknesses who will sometimes say things wrong.

What then does the glorious exalted Christ want his followers to do? Teach all nations. Better translated, make disciples of all nations. This involves two things according to the text. First of all, baptizing them and baptizing in a missionary context is, of course, closely connected with making confession of faith. The goal is that to those to whom we speak would confess Jesus as Lord and enter his church by baptism.

The second part of this commission involves teaching them to do everything that Christ has commanded. This is implied in the words "make disciples." Disciples are students who never graduate. They are for teaching the rest of Scriptures, it's just as important as finding people who have never heard the Gospel. In fact, the sermon tonight is simply an elaboration of this great commission.

Every Bible study, every Catechism class, every speech, every Sunday school class, every Bible class in a Christian school, it is all fulfillment of the great commission. We're not simply to tell people the bare minimum to get them in the door and then check mark another one and say, "Saved. Let's move on." They need to be fed. They need to grow. They need to learn to obey all that Christ has commanded. The church is not just a lighthouse, it's a classroom and the honor of the King is as much involved in learning to do all that he commands as it is in entering the church in the first place.

Being a disciple is every bit as important as being an evangelist. This needs to be stressed because there are parts of the church today who are in such a fever to get people into the church and to tick people off the list and to add to the statistics, that they forget to actually teach them during and after they're in.

A pastor I met in the Netherlands was telling a story of meeting some evangelicals in downtown London. They sat down over coffee. They found out that they were both believers and they started a discussion and somehow the discussion mentioned election and these evangelists said to the pastor, "Oh, don't bother with all that. There are people walking outside who don't have a Savior. We don't need all that doctrine." That is a false

dilemma. We don't have to choose, we may not choose either evangelism or good teaching. Both are important.

Other churches should learn from Reformed churches to value sound doctrine and vigorous teaching, meat and potatoes instead of cotton candy, but we must also learn from others to gain in zeal and passion for the lost and the dying and the world out there. And is it possible that this is one of our weaknesses as a Reformed church? Not because Reformed theology hinders evangelism but perhaps because as Reformed immigrants we have lost sight of the evangelistic dynamite of the Reformed faith.

Church history is stuffed with vigorous examples of blessed, zealous, Reformed evangelists such as George Whitefield, William Carey and the first missionaries to China and India. The doctrines of grace that we have been studying with such great profit and delight as a congregation the last year give the greatest possible encouragement to evangelize for they tell us that all power, including over the hearts and wills of men, is given to Jesus Christ in heaven and on earth. And in this life, strange to even have to ask the question but we must ask it: is this our weakness as a church? I'm asking myself that question too.

Do you know that I actually long to do a confession of faith service in which multiple people are making confession of faith who have never set foot in any church before and become members of this one? Don't get me wrong, I rejoice over every one of our confession students for this year and they, too, are a fulfillment of the great commission, but do you ever long that there would be people who come in here with all their rough edges and who are captured by the Gospel of the grace of God? It seems so far that the church involves a tremendous claim, a worldwide commission, but we should not end there because the text doesn't end there, it ends in a most liberating promise that is meant to send us out not with our heads hanging in guilt and with a sense of failure, but with hearts filled with joyful anticipation and hope.

That is our last point: it is made possible by a liberating promise. Listen to these powerful words. Jesus says, "I am with you always, even unto the end of the world." How this promise needs to be stressed and how it liberates you to be enabled to fulfill this command. Listen to how Jesus stresses it, "lo, I am with you." You could translate, "Look, I am with you." Remember, take note, again and again, "I am with you." Remember who the "I" is. Jesus Christ, the one who has all power in heaven and on earth, who rules the universe, and he says, "I am with you." Not just, "I'm watching you." Not just, "I command you." Not just, "I call you to go. I am with you."

In fact, who the Lord Jesus is bookends this text. Sometimes you get these fancy bookcases that you stack with things or bookshelves that you stack things on top and you keep the books from flopping off the end and onto the floor. You put these metal bookends or solid wood bookends to keep the books standing up. Well, this text has beautiful bookends. Jesus Christ resurrected and ascended in majesty is the one who keeps his people standing as his church carries out this task. This is liberating.

Children, when you're afraid and you walk past a big barking dog of the neighbor on his chain, what comforts you most of all? That your father picks you up and carries you or that he holds your hand as you walk past. And when you face the world out there and if you evangelize, you will meet the scoffer, the rude, the belligerent and the indifferent. Jesus Christ says, "I am with you. I support you. I am behind you all the way. I use my power and wisdom on your behalf."

I read the story once of an Iraqi Christian girl, a Muslim girl who became a Christian. One of her cousins came in with a loaded rifle and he pointed it in her face and he said, "Convert back to Islam or die!" And this girl who had been so weakened, beaten down, as so many Muslim women are, in holy indignation grabbed the barrel and put it in her mouth and said, "Go ahead. I'd rather die than deny my Lord." And the man was so confused that he dropped his gun and ran. Christ was with her.

Soldiers of the ascended Christ, your Commanding Office supports you to the full. He does not forget you for a moment. He sits at God's right hand watching your progress, guiding you, leading you, opening doors, bringing you into contact with people who need the Lord, and he promises to give wisdom and courage and love to those who ask and seek and pray and he'll never let you down. And even if you would end with the apostles beaten, he will enable you to rejoice that you were counted worthy to suffer for Christ's sake. And even if like Paul you should end up in prison with your back whipped and your feet in the stocks, he'll enable you to sing his praise at midnight. And even should you face fines, is the more likely thing here in the West right now, or the loss of many things, he will never leave you to fend for yourself. "I am with you," he says, even should the unthinkable happen and you be called to lay down your life. Remember Stephen, the first martyr, the stones are thudding on his body and he cries out, "I see heaven opened and Jesus Christ standing at the right hand of power."

But the richest proof that Jesus Christ is with his church happens on the day of Pentecost when he pours out his Spirit. It is through the Spirit that he clothes his disciples with power from on high. It is through his Spirit that he converts sinners and makes them saints. Through his Spirit, he lives to apply the fruit of his death and his resurrection throughout the world for this whole world is simply the workshop of a missionary Holy Spirit poured out by a missionary Lord Jesus, sent out by the missionary Father who gathers a missionary church. When you witness, you don't even leave the workshop of the Holy Spirit no matter where you go, to the ends of the earth, to your own backyard. With this Spirit helping you, even the most powerless and weak can become witnesses of Jesus Christ and so can you.

Someone will say, "Yeah, but that's for converted people, right?" This command is given to the entire church and that means it is given to you too and if you don't do it, you are adding sin upon sin of omission. You say, "But how can I witness to someone else if I don't know the grace of the Savior myself?" Then is it not long past time that you get serious, that you wake up, that you bend the proud knees of your rebellion, that you acknowledge this King who holds your entire life in his hands, who could send a fire not to Fort McMurray but here tomorrow? Every breath you take is because the power of the

King opens and closes your lungs and pumps the bellows of your lungs. Every time your heart beats, it is because the power of the ascended Lord Jesus Christ enables it to send out its pulse. Your life is in his hands every moment because he is the King and you have not bowed yet? And if not even for your own sake, there are dying people everywhere out there who need a Savior and you have heard the Gospel, how dare you, how dare you be unconverted?

But we may not end on that note. If you understand this text rightly, those beautiful bookends of who Jesus Christ is as the one who says, "All power in heaven and on earth is given to me," and at the same time says, "and I am with you to the end of the world," should this text not fill you with a tremendous sense of excitement and anticipation? Who knows what the Lord will do through you.

In seminary it was my privilege to hear a guest professor, he's passed away now, may well be one of the godliest men I've ever met, Dr. Grier. He taught a course on apologetics, on evangelism. He was telling us all the many ways, not in a boastful way, the many ways in which the Lord privileged him to speak the Gospel in all kinds of settings and he was teaching us about this and he just stopped at a certain moment and he looked at us and he said, "Teaching this makes me just want to go out there and get at it again!" When you understand who Jesus Christ is, then you learn to face the opportunity of evangelism with that same spirit. Who knows what the Lord will do through you. Amen.