

Sermon File # 878

Scripture Text: Acts 1:6-11

Sermon Title: Jesus' Commission to the Church: *The Task before Us*

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Jesus' Commission to the Church: *The Task before Us*

Introduction:

Open your Bibles with me to Acts 1:1-11, as we continue in our 2008 sermon series from the Book of Acts, which is volume 2 of Luke-Acts. Last Sunday we focused on the opening five verses of the prologue, as we noted that we are called to continue what Jesus began to do. Today we look at "The Commission of the Church," one of several Great Commission passages in the New Testament. Other versions of the Great Commission are found in Matthew 28:19-20 (perhaps the best known) and John 20:21. The doing of the task that Jesus gave his disciples in this commission is the continuation of "all that Jesus began to do and to teach," as we noted last Sunday from verse 1.

Follow as I read Acts 1:1-11, focusing on our text, **Acts 1:6-11**.

Are you familiar with the terms "Great Commission Christian" and "Great Commission Churches"? I "Googled" for Web sites, inputting the words, "Great Commission Christian and churches" and a plethora of sites appeared on my screen. The very first one featured some acquaintances of mine, a physician and a church planter and their spouses, working among the Karamajong people of Northern Uganda. On this particular Web site, this missionary team

encourage churches and individuals to partner with them in prayer and support as fellow “Great Commission Christians and Churches,” helping to share the Gospel with this particular un-reached people group. The second Web site on this Google page was even more aggressive about what it means to be a Great Commission Christian, saying that the only way to be an obedient Christian and obedient church is to be a Great Commission one.

Some of my dear missionary friends are in our worship service today—Ron and Renee McLain. Ron represents a denominational sending agency in the US and coordinates church planting efforts in Belgium. He is a true missiologist, with a PhD in evangelism from an outstanding theological seminary, which happens to be my alma mater ☺ I asked Ron yesterday about whether or not every church is a Great Commission Church and every Christian is to be a Great Commission Christian. His reply reminded me of the famous quote by theologian Emil Brunner, who said, “A church exists by mission as a fire exists by burning.” Ron said basically that a church doesn’t just have a mission but it *is* a mission.

I don’t know about you, but I want to be obedient to Christ, and I want to be pastor of a church that is obedient. And indeed, if the Great Commission is what Christ gave to us and commanded us to fulfill, then we have no choice except to be Great Commission Christians and a Great Commission Church. With the disciples, speaking his last words before his ascension back to heaven, Jesus lays out the task before us.

The six verses of our text spell out for us our commission, our task, from the risen Christ, speaking first of...

➤ **The Program of the Kingdom of God**

In verse 6 we see that the disciples had a misconception of the program of God for his kingdom. Some commentators suggest that these thoughts belonged, not to the inner core of Jesus’ disciples, but rather to a group of marginal followers, who had not been privy to Jesus’ teachings on the Kingdom, which he abundantly and repeatedly gave to the inner core of The Twelve. But it’s not beyond imagining, that even the inner core were still ingrained with Jewish expectations for an immediate messianic rule that would spell the end to Roman political occupation and would mean the fulfillment of prophecies about world-wide domination by God’s perfect rule on earth.

And the program of the Kingdom of God is also often...

- *Not according to our expectations*

Regardless of what Jesus said and taught, such as in his instructions about the end of the age, his followers persist in fabricating false expectations about his

return. Jesus said, “No one knows about the day or hour, not even the angels in heaven, not the Son, but only the Father” (Matthew 24:36). Since the first disciples, we have all been fascinated with the unknown and unknowable, and allowed speculation to distract us from the program of the Kingdom.

Just as these first century followers of Jesus, we want to think that Jesus will immediately fulfill the promises of a consummated kingdom, with no suffering, hardship or even hard work to endure. I think this is the same dynamic behind the popularity of the teaching of a secret pre-tribulation rapture of the church (and hence the popularity of Tim LaHaye’s *Left Behind* book and movie series). Who wouldn’t want to believe that we will be lifted out of this world before the real trouble starts? Yet, thousands of followers of Christ have been and are currently suffering greatly because of their stand for Christ. The hope for a secret pre-tribulation rapture for them seems almost a cruel hoax. Instead of setting our hopes on a secret rapture, we ought rather to heed Jesus’ warnings, who spoke about persecution, about being hated and put to death, and said, “he who stands firm to the end will be saved” (Matthew 24:9-13).

In my home country there are many of my fellow evangelicals who are also caught up in seeking an immediate political kingdom, seeking to find power and influence in the corridors of US political power. They seem oblivious to the fact that Jesus said his kingdom is not of this world (John 18:36).

And so, Jesus gave a kind rebuke to the disciples’ question that revealed their false expectations, saying that “It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority” (verse 7).

We are not to live by our expectations...

- *But according to the expectations of Christ*

Clearly the expectations of Christ are for his program of bringing the Kingdom of God to earth. He taught us to pray to this end, that his kingdom might come and his will be done on earth as it is in heaven” (Matthew 6:10).

✓ The goal of Christ

The goal of Christ is to see his kingdom spread, as Isaiah prophesied, until the earth is “full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea” (Isaiah 11:9). For this reason the eternal Son was incarnated, lived for us, suffered and died, and was raised from the dead for us, that we might have the gift of eternal life. His atoning work for our salvation was finished on the cross (John 19:30). By grace through faith we receive the benefits of Christ’s death and resurrection. As we noted last Sunday, commenting on the opening verses of Acts, Luke writes that his second volume, which we call *Acts*, is a continuation of what Jesus began to do in volume one, his gospel account. The way of salvation was

provided through Jesus Christ, but now the risen Christ Jesus has a remaining goal—that of making this provision of salvation available to the world. And thus through the church he will continue to spread his kingdom, the rule of God, until the kingdom of the world becomes the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and “he will reign for ever and ever” (Revelation 11:15).

Christ Jesus has a passion to bring the rule of God to the world. During his earthly ministry he expressed his wish and even his distress until his work of the cross and resurrection would be completed (Luke 12:49). Since his ascension, his return to the Father’s right hand, Jesus has been working through his church to bring about the fullness of the glory of God, on earth as it is in heaven. The risen Lord Jesus has zeal for God’s glory, even as the Father has zeal for his own praise upon the earth, which was created for his glory and pleasure. The goal of Christ is for the coming of that day when at his name “every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father” (Philippians 2:10-11).

And the goal of Christ is...

✓ The charge to the church

His charge to us is that we are to be his “witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth” (verse 8).

And first, a witness is someone who knows something important that is to be shared. The etymology of the word “witness” is from the word “wit,” for knowledge (See *Webster’s Seventh New Collegiate Dictionary*). Witness is thus both a noun and a verb. We are people who know something that ought to be told. And there are degrees of witnesses. Someone noted that in an automobile accident there may be three types of witnesses—one who stands by the road and observes; one who was in the car but un-injured and one who was injured in the accident. The Greek word translated witness is “marturia,” and witnesses in the New Testament church were so frequently called upon to give their lives in faithful confession of Jesus as Lord that the word for martyr became the word for witness.

And the charge to the church is for us to be “third degree witnesses, faithfully telling by life and words what Christ has done for all, and specifically the difference he has made in our lives. And that means we are to be faithful unto death. And, as Paul says, we often bear in our bodies the marks of Jesus (Galatians 6:17). That means we are called to witness to the cross of Jesus as we follow his pattern of the cruciform, crucified life (Galatians 2:20). Jesus says in our text that we will be his witnesses, and he is the crucified, risen Lord, who calls us to follow in his steps of death to self and all that opposes the Father’s will. We are to make known the saving gospel of Christ and verify by our

transformed lives and illustrated by our testimonies of what Christ is doing in our lives today.

We are his witnesses and we are called, as we see clearly in another Great Commission passage (Matthew 28:19-20), to make disciples of all the nations, that is all the peoples, ethnic groups and categories of the world, beginning in our neighborhoods. Many evangelical churches have been focusing on making Christians, that is, converts who often never progress from believing about Jesus and the gospel to actually following Jesus as Lord, which is the definition of disciple. And certainly most churches and denominations of churches have little to say about “teaching disciples to obey everything Jesus has commanded us (Matthew 28:20).

The church has a great challenge before it. Our individual charge is to be a faithful witness where God has planted us, and to be willing to share Christ in our spheres of influence. Our church challenge is to worship and serve in such a way that we are making and then deploying disciples to the ends of the earth, beginning right here in Brussels, “The Heart of Europe.” The local church is always at the very heart of Jesus’ strategy for world missions, as the church provides the context for the calling out of the called in response to worship and the Word of God. The local church then is the praying, giving, sending and support group, whatever Great Commission organization might be employed in partnership for this task. As a local church, we show our Great Commission heart first of all by our faithfulness to our witness to and evangelization of those right here in our own community. If we don’t have a passion to see the lost around us come to Christ, then anything we do in world missions is a charade. Oswald Smith said it well: “The light that shines the farthest shines the brightest at home.”

✓ The task before us

The task of being faithful witnesses and of making disciples is one we can hardly ignore; it’s right before us. And we need to understand that our task is not about what we can do for Jesus. Dallas Willard reminds us that only Spirit-led, authentic apprentices/disciples of Jesus can change the situation of The Great Omission to the fulfilling of The Great Commission. And our task, he says is not to try to change the world or even change the church. “If we undertake on our own to straighten out the church and the world, we will hurt a lot of people and make ourselves miserable. It’s God’s job, and he will do it, and in the way it should be done—of which we probably have little or no idea at all.”

And this is the reason that my only vision for IBC is God’s vision, which he has given to us here in our text in verse 8. This is the program of God, that we be his Spirit-empowered, disciple-making witnesses, joining the risen Lord Jesus in his work of changing lives and bringing about the fullness of his reign on the earth. Jesus is already at work around us, doing what he has thought about since

before our arrival on the scene. Jesus has been at work in the hearts of those being drawn to our English classes, for example. Nancy and I have been praying for our next-door neighbors and giving a witness whenever we have the opportunity. I was delighted to realize that our neighbor's sister is now in her second year of English classes at IBC and I hope soon she will be able to share with her brother what she is learning about the gospel of Jesus Christ.

All we need to do is ask, "Where is God already moving in hearts, opening doors, bringing passion for ministry?" Then, we simply join him, directing toward those ministries the people and resources God provides.

Our task, Willard says, is simply to walk with Jesus in the fullness of his life and joy, and his presence will be the fiery witness that will spread to others and give us power for the tasks he has given us. Willard quoted from Tertullian's first *Apology* how during the second and third centuries the Kingdom of God was spreading like wildfire throughout society, and that people would "cry out that the state is besieged; the Christians are in the fields, in the ports, in the islands...cities, islands, palaces, senate, forum..." And the disciples of Jesus would say, "Our number increases the more you destroy us. The blood of the martyrs is their seed" (See pages 225-229 in Willard's *The Great Omission: Reclaiming Jesus' Essential Teachings on Discipleship*).

Thus, our task brings us to consider that to do our mission in The Great Commission we need...

➤ **The Power of the Holy Spirit**

The risen Lord was now telling his disciples that the Kingdom would come, but not now and not according to their preferred time and conditions. They were to be part of his program, which must be done by his power, the power of the Holy Spirit, who would live within them and whose fullness of power would come upon them.

Verse 8 tells us about...

- *Our absolute dependence*

19th Century London pastor FB Meyer expressed well the way those first disciples must have felt overwhelmed by the task before them:

"The task that awaited that little group was one of unparalleled difficulty. They were charged with the obligation, not only of publishing the Evangel, but of inaugurating a revolution. They were to turn men from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God. They were to disciple all nations, speaking different languages, scattered over the vast Roman Empire, which extended from

the Atlantic to the Far East. They were to initiate a mission of regeneration and renewal, comparable to a new creation. They were to substitute Christianity for paganism, as the foundation of a new type of civilization. Upon the reception or rejection of their message eternal issues hung. In fact, humanly speaking and without exaggeration, it depended on that tiny group of unknown and ordinary men and women, whether the Incarnation and Death, the Resurrection and Ascension, of the Son of God would obtain the audience and acceptance of mankind.

“The task was stupendous, and the obstacles to success immeasurable. There were the philosophies and priesthoods of the ancient religions, jealous of the least invasion of their vested interests. There were the shameless license and immorality of the Roman Empire, which have left their trail on the epistles of the New Testament, as well as in the locked chambers of Pompeii. There was also the pride of the Caesars, who would not brook the rivalry of another King, ‘one Jesus, whom Paul affirmed to be alive.’ In addition, let it be remembered that they had to conquer through the Cross. The Cross! It was the symbol of unutterable shame. The Cross! By common consent it was never to be mentioned in polite society. The Cross! Only the lowest criminals were condemned to suffer its terrible and shameful torture. To the Jews it was a stumbling block, and to the Greeks foolishness. But this was to be the royal standard under which our Lord marshaled His troops to overcome the world!” (FB Meyer, page 401, volume VI, *20 Centuries of Great Preaching*).

In the task that we face, to be authentic and faithful followers and witnesses in this culture of spiritual darkness, it is no less daunting, even though we may feel less overwhelmed socially and culturally than did this tiny group at the mount of Jesus’ ascension. But if we are to be faithful to our calling, which also is to continue in Kingdom of God advance against the overwhelming powers of darkness, we absolutely depend on the risen Lord Jesus and...

- *The promised gift*

Last Sunday we considered what Jesus referred to as “the gift my Father promised,” which is the Holy Spirit. And here in our text Jesus says “But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you” (verse 8). Here is one of those great Trinitarian passages in the Bible. The Father sends the Spirit, who will continue the work of the crucified and risen Son.

In John’s Gospel, chapters 14-16, Jesus speaks at length about the promised Holy Spirit, who will empower the disciples to continue the work of the risen Lord Jesus after his return to the Father, following the finished work of the cross and resurrection. Jesus promises in those passages that the Spirit will enable us to do even greater things than he did prior to the cross and resurrection (in scope, through his working through a church scattered throughout the earth. John 14:12). The Holy Spirit is Christ within us (Colossians 1:27), to be our Teacher

and also our Helper and Enabler. The Spirit in us is what allows Jesus to continue his work *in us, through us and as us*.

Of course this gift is...

✓ For the converted

Referring again to my brief phone visit with my missionary friend Ron McLain, I asked Ron if every Christian be a Great Commission Christian. He said that missions should be in every converts DNA! Anyone who has come to know Christ takes on the mind and spirit of Christ, which is the spirit of mission—wanting to lead others into the kingdom of God.

Every child of God has the Holy Spirit, has been regenerated, made new, and born from above through the Holy Spirit (John 3:3-8; Romans 8:9-14). All who have trusted Christ, receiving grace for repentance toward God and faith in Christ are given the abiding presence of the Holy Spirit. It's possible, of course, to be a nominal Christian and have a false sense of security, based on having recited a prayer or having given assent to a "plan of salvation." But those who have wholeheartedly responded to grace with repentance and faith and have begun to follow Jesus as Lord are to gain assurance of salvation through the abiding presence of Jesus (1 John 3:21-24).

And there are no hierarchies in God's kingdom. All of God's people are given the Spirit and an absolutely indispensable role in The Great Commission. God tends to use the ordinary people of this world to advance his Kingdom. Eugene Peterson, in *Leap over a Wall*, tells of his being a guest in a home along with other professors from the theological college where he now teaches. The hostess asked everyone around the dinner table to tell about the person who most influenced his or her life. What impressed Peterson was the fact that none of these very influential people mentioned a pastor or church vocational person. It was a layman God used. I don't consider myself influential or important, but also in my case, it was a young Air Force officer, Lt. Medley, a former college basketball player, who spent a lot of his weekends and week nights working with us boys in a missions organization called Royal Ambassadors. I remember his actually taking time to listen to us and laugh with us, play basketball with us and show us the inside of a fighter jet. All the while, this man was investing in my life, and giving me confidence that lasted a lifetime.

The above does not mean pastors and full-time church vocational people are unimportant. In fact, when laymen get hold of the idea they are gifted with the Holy Spirit to minister in their spheres of influence, it is evidence that the pastor-teachers are doing their jobs!

And the power of the Holy Spirit is given...

✓ For the obedient

A lot of people are interested in spirituality and even spiritual gifts, but are less than interested in a life of obedience to the Great Commission. God does not give his Holy Spirit in special anointing, that which I think is meant by the full baptism of the Holy Spirit, if we are simply wanting a spiritual charge of some kind. The Corinthian church was dominated by those who wanted spiritual gifts and charisma in order to control others and denigrate their God-appointed leaders. But Christ gives his power and full measure of blessing to those who abide in him in obedient, moral and self-less living. You would not give your car keys to your five-year-old. She or he is not ready for that responsibility. And I cannot but wonder if God would anoint me with greater power if I proved more faithful and to our church, if we were ready to be responsible in obedience and service.

The Spirit of Jesus gives the fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:26-27) the mind/attitude of Christ (1 Corinthians 2:16; Philippians 2:5-8), and a willingness to give and even to suffer for his sake. But also, the Spirit gives us a joy and delight in the fellowship and presence of Christ, and a hunger to ever know him in a deeper way (Philippians 3:10-11).

Jesus promised that the Holy Spirit would be our power for our task—living for and sharing Jesus with the world around us: “But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; *and you will be my witnesses...*” (Verse 8).

And consider with me...

- *The difference the Holy Spirit makes*

And the Holy Spirit does give us power for living a faithful, godly and fruitful life. He also is the key to an abundant and joyful life. And in our daily life and spiritually dark world, it takes power to have joy and peace, the kind of joy and peace that the lost world around us will notice and even admire. And the Holy Spirit will mean the difference between our being overwhelmed in spiritual warfare or our being victorious against the Enemy and his dupes, who are all around us.

The word in our text for power is the Greek “dunamis.” Nancy and I in July of 2006 enjoyed our first visit to Sweden, and one of our excursions was a boat trip around the many waterways of Stockholm. We rode past the Old Courthouse, where are held annually the presentation of the Nobel Peace Prize. The Swede Alfred Nobel made his fortune that still endows the famous peace prize, by discovering in the 1860’s what was at the time the greatest explosive in the world. He asked a Greek professor what is the Greek word for explosive power and he was told it was “dunamis.” So Nobel named his new invention “dynamite” (pages 22-23, *Acts: an Expository Commentary*, by Donald Grey Barnhouse).

God gives his power, not for destructive purposes, which is the way explosives are being used so horribly in our world today. But God gives his power for the good of his kingdom and the glory of his name. We have all of the power that we need to live the new life in Christ. In fact, Paul says it is none less than the very power that raised Christ Jesus from the dead:

“That power (dunamis) is like the working of his mighty strength, which he exerted in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms” (Ephesians 1:19-20).

And after Jesus was taken from the sight of the disciples, they stood gazing into the sky, where Jesus mysteriously left the realm of this world to enter the realm, another dimension, which Scripture calls the kingdom of the heavens. Two men dressed in white, no doubt angels, then gave them...

➤ **The Promise of Jesus' Return**

These disciples were naturally amazed as they watched their Lord “taken up before their very eyes, and a cloud hid him from their sight” (verse 9). “The cloud is at one and the same time the vehicle which envelops Jesus and transports him away, and the sign of the heavenly glory of God” [cf. Luke 9:34f; Revelation 11:12], I Howard Marshall, page 61, *Acts*, Tyndale NT Commentaries). In response to this phenomenal “Shekinah glory” departure, the disciples received a word of explanation from these angelic messengers (verse 10). They spoke to the disciples about...

- *The mystery of his return*

The ascension of Jesus was a mysterious phenomenon, captivating, of course, the full attention of these on-looking disciples (“looking intently up into the sky,” verse 10).

To us, the kingdom of the heavens is a realm of mystery, but that does not mean it is less real than this earthly realm where we now live. The risen Lord has a real, resurrection body, a fact which he fully impressed upon his disciples during the 40 days of his post-resurrection, pre-ascension appearances. The most obvious difference between his risen body and the mortal is seen in his now being free from the limitations of mortal existence, such as the limits of space and time. Jesus simply appeared in his risen body in the closed Upper Room with the disciples. He could eat with his disciples in his resurrection body, but he did not seem to need food any longer. And at his ascension, Jesus left the realm of earth and entered another realm, where he now dwells in his resurrection body. As Wayne Grudem explains, although we cannot now see where Jesus is, he is “somewhere,” and has not simply “passed into some

ethereal state of being, which has no location in the space-time universe” (For a discussion of the doctrine of Jesus’ ascension, see pages 616-617, of Grudem’s *Systematic Theology*). The heavenly realm is what the Bible calls “the kingdom of the heavens,” and is more real than this earthly creation, which is temporal and in the process of being redeemed (Romans 8:19-21). We shouldn’t think of heaven as “some place out there,” which can be seen with mortal eyes, lest we be as pagan in our thinking as the Russian cosmonaut, who declared after returning from space that he proved there is no God because he didn’t see him! (See Grudem, page 617).

But we are to live in the awareness that we belong to another realm, another kingdom not of this world, as Jesus explained to Pilate (John 18:36). And our calling is to live in the awareness that we are surrounded by heaven’s angels. Sometimes we are permitted to catch glimpses of our heavenly kingdom, and occasionally heaven’s citizens are permitted to pay special visits to us. (I think of CS Lewis’ posthumous visit to New Testament scholar JB Phillips, as recounted in his testimonial book, *The Ring of Truth*).

The most precious awareness, however, is that the risen Lord Jesus is alive *somewhere*, and even present with us through the Holy Spirit. Our calling and commission is to pray, live and serve to the end that the kingdom of God will come to earth (Matthew 6:9) and that the kingdom of the world will become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he will reign for ever and ever” (Revelation 11:15). And when work on earth is done, the heavenly city will descend and be established on the redeemed earth, even as Jesus ascended into heaven (Revelation 21). As NT Wright as said, we shouldn’t think so much of the parousia as a second coming as we should think of it as a second appearing, since he really hasn’t left us so much as has physically disappeared during this church age when he resides in his people through the Spirit (pages 217ff, *Simply Christian: Why Christianity Makes Sense*).

As Great Commission disciples we are to live in the awareness of the mystery and glorious reality of Jesus’ promised return which is...

- *Our confidence in his return*

The angels assured the disciples that the mystery of Jesus’ ascension would be followed by the mystery of his return. By our living in the daily awareness of the risen Lord Jesus, dwelling in our hearts by faith, we have the assurance that “This same Jesus...will come back” (verse 11). Our assurance of the Lord’s return is not gained by our buying into someone’s theory about a rapture or a Second Coming based upon a speculatively prophetic timetable. The assurance we are to have is that of followers of Jesus who experience his presence day by day. And we know that the one who has not left us as orphans will keep his promise to take us to heaven when we die and to consummate his kingdom on earth (John 14:1-4).

Of course we believe that Jesus is returning to earth in glory some day, at some time in history, ending earthly history as we know it. And, since biblical history is linear history, his coming is closer than ever before. And, living in the wake of “9-11,” all sorts of speculation about his coming abound, with all of the events in the Middle East bringing out “the best” in end-time prophecies. But our living in light of the Lord’s return is to be no different than that which Jesus exhorted in his “little apocalypse” (Mark 13; Matthew 24; Luke 17). We are to live with faithful witness and perseverance during times of peace as well as persecution and also with persistence in godly readiness for the Master’s return, as Jesus himself teaches us.

- *Our participation in his return*

And so we come full circle in our study of these first eleven verses of Acts. Acts is the Acts of Jesus through his Spirit-baptized, Spirit-filled church, who continue all that Jesus began to do (verse 1).

Jesus’ finished work on the cross provided the “medicine” for the cure for the sins of the world. Now, through the Holy Spirit, we are to carry the medicine to the lost, in our spheres of influence and into all of the world, through the church’s missionary enterprise. The life and work of the local church is the New Testament strategy for reaching the world, and missionary sending organizations simply help facilitate this work. In the local church the gospel is preached “in Jerusalem” (verse 8) and teaching is done to make disciples and teach everything that Jesus has commanded (Matthew 28:19-20). And out of the church those are sent whom God is calling on special assignment, “in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth” (verse 8), to cross language and cultural barriers with the gospel of Jesus Christ (Acts 13:1-3).

We participate in the return of Jesus Christ through our involvement in gathering in his people for whom he died, and in taking the gospel to “every tribe and language and people and nation” (Revelation 5:9; 7:9). When the gospel has been preached to all nations (Mark 13:10), so that God will be forever glorified by all of his elect from every “corner” of the earth, then the end will come. The work that the Father continues to do through his church, that of making worshipers (John 4:23), what Bill Hull (in *The Disciple-Making Pastor* calls, “populating heaven with worshipers”), must be completed. I think that when the first century church prayed “Marana tha,” “Come, O Lord,” they were aware that they were participants in his return (1 Corinthians 16:22; Revelation 22:20). As they saw people come to faith and become worshipers of Christ, they knew that the Lord was “one person closer” to returning. Perhaps Peter had this in mind when he spoke of our speeding the coming of the day of God (2 Peter 3:12). By this prayer for the appearing of the Lord the first century believers were prompted to greater zeal in sharing their witness and in readying themselves for Jesus’ return.

Whenever someone is converted into a worshiper of Christ, there is another “tick” in the countdown of God’s eschatological time clock.

Conclusion:

We are privileged to participate with Jesus in his continuing work, his commission, which is our task. We should be both humbled and heartened that he allows us this privilege. The risen Lord Jesus allows us to join him in his ongoing kingdom mission in the world. And that thought should cause us to realize the enormity and privilege of our task in the Great Commission.

The way Luke wrote his second volume, the one we call *Acts*, was open-ended. It ends with Paul witness in Rome, “boldly and without hindrance” (Acts 28:31). Luke leaves us plenty of paper to write “Acts 29,” plenty of manuscript paper for Jesus’ “Unfinished Symphony.” And God is still writing the stories of those who dare to be faithful to the Great Commission. I want to be listed among the faithful who dared to be a part of what Jesus continues to do and teach (verse 1).

I invite you to join me in making or renewing such a commitment as pastor and people together in the glorious task of the Great Commission. I want to be obedient to Jesus and want IBC to be an obedient, God-blessed people of God.

New Testament scholar, John Polhill, notes that the future tense in verse 8 “has an imperatival sense: ‘you *will* [must] receive power; ‘you *will* be my witnesses” (page 85, *Acts: an Exegetical and Theological Exposition of Holy Scripture* (NAC). Our calling and the task Jesus gives us are not an option for us. These were the last words of Jesus before his bodily return to heaven. Last words are always words to be remembered. The last words of parents to their children have this same “imperatival future tense.” “You *will* remember to do your laundry and watch you bank account,” says an anxious parent to her son departing for university. Jesus says to us, if we want his blessing and lives and a church that glorify him, “You *will* receive power... and you *will* be my witnesses...to the ends of the earth.” This is the task before us.

Questions for personal reflection and/or group discussion:

1. What is your definition of a Great Commission Christian and a Great Commission church?
2. According to Acts 1:8, what is the mandate that Jesus has given the church?
3. How do you define the word “witness,” and what is our witnessing responsibility?
4. What are the resources we are given to enable us to carry out our mission in the Great Commission?
5. What were the expectations of these disciples, as we read in verse 6?
6. What are the expectations of many in the church today regarding the return of Christ?
7. What difference should your expectations of Christ’s return make in your life and witness?

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