

St. John's Baptist Church
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Title: Evangelism: The Great Commission
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INTRODUCTION: It is **not** my attempt to give a step-by-step plan on how to evangelize. The goal here is to **introduce** and **study** the Great Commission, that Jesus instructed the early disciples and the twelve Apostles before and after his crucifixion and resurrection. I wish to discuss evangelism in the early days of the church and point out from scripture the parallels for us today. I hope to show that it starts first with you, second with your family and third with anyone else you will encounter in the world. (Note: Facilitators' comments are highlighted in blue)

LESSON SCRIPTURE(s): - Act 1 and Matthew 10

MEMORY SCRIPTURE: Matthew 28: 18 – 20 “The Great Commission”

“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^b all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: ²⁰ Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world. Amen.” ¹¹

BACKGROUND:

¹²Acts 1:4-5: “*And, being assembled together with them, commanded them that they should not depart from Jerusalem, but wait for the promise of the Father, which, saith he, ye have heard of me.... For John truly baptized with water; but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost not many days hence.... But ye shall receive power^a, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth.”*

¹³After Jesus was crucified, he died, was buried, and he rose from the dead (resurrection). However, before his ascension, he appeared before several witnesses. In particular, he went to his apostles and other disciples for 40 days. He spoke to them of things about the kingdom of God. He also commanded them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to **wait** until the promise from

^b teach...: or, make disciples, or, Christians of all nations

¹¹ *The Holy Bible : King James Version.* Oak Harbor, WA : Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1995, S. Mt 28:18

¹² *The Holy Bible : King James Version.* Oak Harbor, WA : Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1995, S. Ac 1:4

^a power...: or, the power of the Holy Ghost coming upon you

¹³ *The Holy Bible : King James Version.* Oak Harbor, WA : Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1995, S. Ac 1:8

God to arrive. **What is the key or action verb here in the passage of Acts 1:4? Why do you think this is/was important in the lives of the first Christians?**

The times before and leading up to Jesus' birth and crucifixion were very tumultuous. People were dying, sickness ever more rampant, folks losing their minds, and neighboring countries fighting one another, (i.e. Jews and their enemies, conquering nations i.e. Romans Empire was in power this time). **Not too different than today, right? Wouldn't you say that humans today still need a Savior just like yesterday?**

LESSON CONTENT: (Act Chapter 1 and Matthew Chapter 10)

Evangelism, What is it? We as Christians should know what the Gospel of Jesus Christ is.

I. They Believed in the Risen Christ (Acts 1:1–11)¹⁴

Jesus was crucified, he died and after His resurrection, Jesus remained on earth for forty days ministering to His disciples. He had already opened their minds to understand the Old Testament message about Himself (Luke 24:44–48), but there were other lessons they needed to learn before they could launch out in their new ministry. Jesus appeared and disappeared during those forty days, and the believers never knew when He might show up. It was excellent preparation for the church because the days were soon coming when He would no longer be on earth to instruct them personally. We as believers today never know when our Lord may return, so our situation is somewhat similar to theirs.

The Lord taught them several important lessons during that time of special ministry:

The reality of His resurrection (v. 3). Some of the believers may have had their doubts forty days before (Mark 16:9–14), but there could be no question now that Jesus had indeed been raised from the dead. To strengthen their faith, He gave them “many infallible proofs”. We know that when Jesus met His disciples, He invited them to touch His body, and He even ate before them (Luke 24:38–43). Whatever proofs He gave, they were convincing.

Faith in His resurrection was important to the church . Why? The message of the Gospel involves the truth of the Resurrection (Rom. 10:9–10; 1 Cor. 15:1–8); and, if Jesus were dead, the church would be speechless. Finally, the official Jewish position was that the disciples had stolen Jesus' body from the tomb (Matt. 28:11–15), and the believers had to be able to refute this as they witnessed to the nation.

These believers were chosen to be special witnesses of Christ's resurrection, and that was the emphasis in their ministry (Acts 1:22; 2:32; 3:15; 5:30–32). Most of the people in Jerusalem knew that Jesus of Nazareth had been crucified, but they did not know that He had been raised from the dead. By their words, their walk, and their mighty works, the believers told the world that Jesus was alive. This was “the sign of Jonah” that Jesus had promised to the nation (Matt. 12:38–41)—His death, burial, and resurrection.

The coming of His kingdom (v. 3). This refers to the reign of God over the hearts and lives of those who have trusted Him (see Matt. 6:33; Rom. 14:17; 1 John 3:1–9). When you read the four Gospels, you discover that the Apostles had a strongly political view of the kingdom and were especially concerned about their own positions and privileges. Being loyal Jews, they

¹⁴Wiersbe, Warren W.: *The Bible Exposition Commentary*. Wheaton, Ill. : Victor Books, 1996, c1989, S. Ac 1:1

longed for the defeat of their enemies and the final establishment of the glorious kingdom under the rule of King Messiah. They did not realize that there must first be a spiritual change in the hearts of the people .

God has not revealed His timetable to us and it is futile for us to speculate. The important thing is not to be curious about the future but to be busy in the present, sharing the message of God's *spiritual* kingdom. This is another emphasis in the Book of Acts (see Acts 8:12; 14:22; 20:25; 28:23, 31).

The power of His Holy Spirit (vv. 4–8). John the Baptist had announced a future baptism, that of the Holy Spirit (Matt. 3:11; John 1:33; and see Acts 11:16), and now that prophecy would be fulfilled. Jesus had also promised the coming of the Spirit (John 14:16–18). It would be power for the disciples so that they would be able to serve the Lord and accomplish His will.

Acts 1:8 is a key verse. To begin with, it explains that the power of the church comes from the **Holy Spirit and not from man** . God's people experienced repeated fillings of the Spirit as they faced new opportunities and obstacles (Acts 2:4; 4:8, 31; 9:17; 13:9). Ordinary people were able to do extraordinary things because the Spirit of God was at work in their lives. The ministry of the Holy Spirit is not a luxury; **it is an absolute necessity.**

We hear a great deal these days about "soul winning," and the emphasis is a good one. However, not every Christian can bring a sinner to the place of faith and decision **but every Christian can bear faithful witness** to the Savior. "A true witness delivered souls" (Prov. 14:25).

Acts 1:8 also gives us a general outline of the Book of Acts as it describes the geographical spread of the Gospel: from Jerusalem (Acts 1–7) to Judea and Samaria (Acts 8–9), and then to the Gentiles and to the ends of the earth (Acts 10–28). No matter where we live, as Christians we should begin our **witness at home** and then extend it "**into all the world.**"

The assurance of His coming again (vv. 9–11). Our Lord's ascension into heaven was an important part of His ministry, for if He had not returned to the Father, He could not have sent the promised gift of the Holy Spirit (John 16:5–15). Also, in heaven today, the Savior is our interceding High Priest, giving us the grace that we need for life and service (Heb. 4:14–16). He is also our Advocate before the Father, forgiving us when we confess our sins (1 John 1:9–2:2). The exalted and glorified Head of the church is now working with His people on earth and helping them accomplish His purposes.

II. They Believed in Each Other (Acts 1:12–14)¹⁵

They obeyed their Lord's commandment and returned to Jerusalem "with great joy". There was among these believers a wonderful unity that bound them together in Christ, the kind of unity that Christians need today. "

While Christians must have faith in the Lord, there are times when it seems as though our faith can waiver. We must also "*forsake not the assembly of ourselves...*" (*Hebrews 10:25*). **Why?** To these 120 people (Acts 1:15) the Lord had given the solemn responsibility of bearing witness to a lost world, and none of them could do the job alone. They would experience severe persecution in the days ahead, and one of them, James, would lay down his life for Christ. It was not a time for asking, "Who is the greatest?" or, "Who committed the greatest sin?" It was a time for praying together and standing together in the Lord. As they waited and worshiped together, they were being better prepared for the work that lay before them.

¹⁵Wiersbe, Warren W.: *The Bible Exposition Commentary*. Wheaton, Ill. : Victor Books, 1996, c1989, S. Ac 1:12

III. They Believed in Prayer (Acts 1:15, 24–25)¹⁶

Prayer plays a significant role in the story of the church as recorded in the Book of Acts. The believers prayed for guidance in making decisions. **Some examples are:**

1. Courage to witness for Christ Acts 1:15–26 (Acts 4:23–31). In fact, prayer was a normal part of their daily ministry (Acts 2:42–47; 3:1; 6:4).
2. Stephen prayed as he was being stoned (Acts 7:55–60). Peter and John prayed for the Samaritans (Acts 8:14–17),
3. Saul of Tarsus prayed after his conversion (Acts 9:11).
4. Peter prayed before he raised Dorcas from the dead (Acts 9:36–43).
5. Cornelius prayed that God would show him how to be saved (Acts 10:1–4)
6. Peter was on the housetop praying when God told him how to be the answer to Cornelius' prayers (Acts 10:9).
7. The church at Antioch fasted and prayed before sending out Barnabas and Paul (Acts 13:1–3; and note 14:23).
8. It was at a prayer meeting in Philippi that God opened Lydia's heart (Acts 16:13)
9. Prayer meeting in Philippi opened the prison doors (Acts 16:25)
10. Paul prayed for his friends before leaving them (Acts 20:36; 21:5). In the midst of a storm, he prayed for God's blessing (Acts 27:35), and after a storm, he prayed that God would heal a sick man (Acts 28:8).

In almost every chapter in Acts you find a reference to prayer, and the book makes it very clear that something happens when God's people pray. This is certainly a good lesson for the church today.

IV. They Believed in God's Leading (Acts 1:16–23)¹⁷

The Lord Jesus was no longer with them to give them personal directions, but they were not without the leading of the Lord, for they had the Word of God and prayer. However, let us also see that Jesus had left a leader, Peter, who took charge during the days of the early church. Just as in our times today, Jesus will direct our Pastor who will lead the congregation in any organized Evangelism. In fact, the Word of God and prayer formed the foundation for the ministry of the early church as recorded in the Book of Acts (Acts 6:4). **Wouldn't you agree that this true today?**

When the Spirit came at Pentecost, it was for the purpose of filling the believers with power and baptizing them into one body in Christ. **When we accept Jesus, this same power from the Holy Spirit (the promise of the Father) dwells within us at the time we accept Christ.**

¹⁶Wiersbe, Warren W.: *The Bible Exposition Commentary*. Wheaton, Ill. : Victor Books, 1996, c1989, S. Ac 1:12

¹⁷Wiersbe, Warren W.: *The Bible Exposition Commentary*. Wheaton, Ill. : Victor Books, 1996, c1989, S. Ac 1:12

THE KING'S AMBASSADORS ¹⁸

Matthew 10

The work of salvation could be accomplished only by Jesus Christ, and He did it alone. But the *witness* of this salvation could only be accomplished by His people, those who have trusted Him and have accepted him for salvation. The King needed ambassadors to carry the message—and He *still* needs them. “Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?” It is not enough that we *pray* for laborers. We must also make ourselves available to serve Him.

Before Jesus sent His ambassadors out to minister, He preached an “ordination sermon” to encourage and prepare them. In this sermon, the King had something to say to *all* of His servants—past (those whom he personally chose), present (we today), and future (those who will be evangelized).

We must not be afraid to openly confess Christ. There are a few reasons found in Matthew 10:

1. Suffering is to be expected- They persecuted Jesus when he ministered on earth, so why should we expect anything different?
2. God will bring everything to light- The enemies of Christ use secret deceptive means to oppose the Gospel. True believers are open and courageous in their lives and witness. We have nothing to hide.
3. We fear God alone- Why? God, the Father is the **only one** who can **destroy** both body and soul.
4. God Cares for his own – God is concerned about all of the details of our lives.
5. Christ honors those who confess Him –Confession means more than making a statement with the lips. The walk and the talk must go together.
6. We cannot escape conflict- Once we have identified with Jesus Christ and confess Him, we are part of a war. God has declared war on Satan. But the battle is the Lords’ and he has already been victorious!
7. We can be a blessing to others- Not everyone will reject our witness! Some people are hungry for the truth!

Summary

Evangelism means to witness (tell) the Gospel (“Good News”) of Jesus Christ, by our life, actions and words. As we can see in Matthew Chapter 10: it starts at home. We need to be prepared through prayer, scripture and by all means depending on the power of the Holy Spirit.

In Acts Chapter 1, and in the entire book of Acts, Jesus gave the charge to be a witness first at home, then with our neighbors and finally in the world. You must know what and who you believe in. We must pray and study the scriptures. We must encourage one another and realize that not everyone we share the Gospel of Jesus Christ with, will accept Him. However, the important point is that we...¹⁹ *Go ye therefore, and teach^b all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: ²⁰ Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you alwas, even unto the end of the world. Amen.*”¹⁹ **God will give the increase!**

¹⁸Wiersbe, Warren W.: *The Bible Exposition Commentary*. Wheaton, Ill. : Victor Books, 1996, c1989, S. Mt 10:1

^b teach...: or, make disciples, or, Christians of all nations

¹⁹ *The Holy Bible : King James Version*. Oak Harbor, WA : Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1995, S. Mt 28:19-20

Questions for Reflection

Heartlight Daily Verse - by Phil Ware - September 5 Matthew 28:18-20

1. Thoughts on today's verse

Last words. The last words of a parent to a child leaving for college. The last words of a loved one at the bedside of someone dying. The last words of a friend before moving to a distant place. These last words are chosen with care because they leave a lasting impact. Jesus' last words are our marching orders. "Go make disciples of all peoples! To do this, "he emphasized, "you must go where they are, baptize them, and then teach them to do what I taught you to do." **Not hard to understand, so what are we doing about obeying those last commands?**

Prayer:

Father from whom all peoples derive their hope, use your Spirit to rouse within me a passion to share your grace with all peoples. Nudge me out of my safety zone and call me into your empowering and sacrificial grace so that I help others come to know you. Through Jesus I pray. Amen.¹¹

From Evangelism Explosion¹²

2. **If you were to die tonight where would you spend eternity?**

3. **If you died and stood before Jesus and he asked you why should I let you enter into my kingdom? What would you say?**

¹¹ Heartlight Daily Verse - by Phil Ware - September 5

¹² Evangelism Explosion