

Matthew 28:16-20 (1984 NIV)
Go ... And I'll Be With You

Introduction

On 19 October 1899, 17-year-old Robert Goddard climbed a cherry tree in his backyard and experienced what he later called a sudden and great realization. Looking at the stars, he imagined how wonderful it would be to make a rocket which had the possibility of reaching the moon. In his diary he wrote, "When I descended that tree, my life was suddenly and powerfully filled with purpose."

As an American physicist and inventor, Robert Goddard's early musings about building a rocket large enough to reach the moon were met with considerable scepticism. When his missiles fizzled, his colleagues would taunt him and sarcastically ask, "Robert, how goes your moon-going rocket?" Even after he launched the first successful liquid-fuelled rocket named Nell that flew 184 feet in March of 1926, many sceptics remained unconvinced.

Then in 1929, Robert Goddard successfully launched an 11-foot, liquid-fuelled missile. How did the public respond? The local paper covered the story beneath a cynical headline: "Moon Rocket Misses Target By 238,799 1/2 Miles".

Thanks to the early research of Robert Goddard, mankind has now sent rockets to the moon and back, and even beyond to Mars. All this has been achieved in spite of the early days of scepticism and doubts. The point is this: Do not mock the days of small beginnings!

(<http://www.gospelweb.net/ronsermons4/DoNotMockTheDayOfSmallBeginnings.htm>)

The final section of Matthew 28 is the place where Jesus gives His disciples what we traditionally call the Great Commission. The Resurrected Christ was speaking to His people, especially to His eleven close disciples. Basically, He was commissioning them to go and make a great movement out of the Christian faith. But how do you get only a dozen followers (minus the one who had betrayed Him) to do that? Humanly speaking, it doesn't seem possible at all.

But do not mock the days of small beginnings! The Christian faith has not vanished from the face of the earth. Today, some 2,000 years later, it is still one of the largest faith movements in the world.

However, the early part of the Great Commission does not seem like a good way to begin a worldwide movement. It seems like ...

©2020-2021 John Yuen Ministry

You are permitted to use this sermon or article for free. If you choose to publish excerpts from it, please provide link or attribution back to the version on johnyuen.org.

II. A Difficult Reality (vv. 16-17)

16 Then the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had told them to go.

17 When they saw him, they worshiped him; but some doubted.

These two verses set the scene for the Great Commission. Having risen from the dead, Jesus now meets His eleven disciples at “the mountain” in Galilee. These eleven men are the closest friends Jesus has on earth. Now Jesus is about to leave them.

Imagine this conversation you have with the Lord at this time:

- “Lord, what’s your plan to reach the world?”
- “I’ve got eleven men.”
- “That’s all?”
- “No, there are more, but these are the key men.”
- “I thought you had twelve.”
- “I did, but one of them betrayed me.”

Just eleven men to reach the world—it doesn’t sound very hopeful isn’t it? But it gets worse. Verse 17 says, “When they saw him, they worshiped him; but some doubted.” Honestly, not too encouraging to have lost one of your key men to betrayal, but worse still, some of those who remain begin to doubt you. Hard to build a great movement on doubting men!

Eleven men to reach the world—it doesn’t sound very hopeful. But that’s what Jesus has as He comes to the end of His sojourn on earth. Only eleven men and some doubted—that’s the difficult reality. And we are now maybe many weeks after the Resurrection ... and some of His best men still doubt Him. They aren’t sure it’s really Him.

Jesus seemingly ignores the whole issue. It’s almost as if Jesus is saying, “Some doubt but that’s fine, we’ll just go with what we have. Don’t worry about anything. Don’t even worry about your doubts. Go and make disciples, and in your going, your doubts will disappear.” I think that’s exactly what happened.

Go in obedience even when not all is certain, and doubts will begin to disappear.

Jesus then moves on to make ...

III. An Amazing Declaration (v. 18)

18 Then Jesus came to them and said, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.”

How would the first disciples fare as they spread out from Jerusalem? Those who went south would soon encounter the mighty pyramids of ancient Egypt. In Alexandria (Egypt) they would encounter the greatest library of the ancient world. How would Jesus' men fare against the learned, wise men of Alexandria?

Those who went north would come to Antioch, another seat of learning and culture in the ancient world. That's the land of Socrates and Aristotle.

Eventually the early Christians would come to Rome, with its magnificent Coliseum and the vast grandeur of the Roman Empire. Who would dare to preach Christ there?

How would the Christian message survive? It would survive all the assaults against it because all power in heaven and on earth has been given to Jesus Christ. When the disciples entered Alexandria, they need not fear because there was no power in Alexandria greater than the power of Jesus Christ. And in Rome, the seat of imperial power could not compare to the power in the One who sits at the right hand of the Almighty God.

All of that to say this: *We have nothing to fear as we go because the power of Jesus far surpasses the power and authority of this world.*

What an amazing declaration indeed!

Following this amazing declaration, Jesus gives the Great Commission to His disciples, and it embodies ...

IV. A Great Promise (vv. 19-20)

19 Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,
20 and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.

The modern reader may say, "This is impossible. Exactly how are 11 men to disciple all nations, especially when some of them still doubt? It can't be done."

Really, we make a huge mistake if we read the Great Commission apart from its context. Jesus is not saying, "Okay, guys. It's up to you." If that's the meaning, then the whole Christian movement would have died maybe within a year.

Here is the real meaning—"You're not equal to this, but I am," says the Lord.

This is a promise of the ongoing presence of the Son of God with His people wherever they go; no matter how far they go; even to the very end of the age.

©2020-2021 John Yuen Ministry

You are permitted to use this sermon or article for free. If you choose to publish excerpts from it, please provide link or attribution back to the version on johnyuen.org.

Perhaps, we should paraphrase Matthew 28:16-20 in context as uttered by the Lord like this:

- “I have all power.”
- “Don’t worry. I’m with you wherever you go.”
- “Now go and make disciples.”

We tend to focus on “now go and make disciples”—i.e. the going part. But the going part is totally impossible without the first two parts—“I have all power,” and “Don’t worry. I’m with you wherever you go.”

The real message should be something like this:

- “Go, and I (the Lord) will go with you.”
- “Go, and I (the Lord) will go ahead of you.”
- “Go, and I (the Lord) will take care of you.”

Many Christians have a lot of fears about speaking for the Lord and sharing the Gospel. It’s a hostile world out there and it can seem very scary. These days you might run into all kinds of people, including folks who don’t want any kind of religion, especially the kind that calls people to go out and share their faith with others.

You can avoid some of these situations if you decide never to talk about your faith at all. But if you retreat into your safe sanctuary where you are surrounded by Christians and only by Christians, you will never discover the true power and presence of Jesus.

The Great Promise from the Lord to us today is this: “I am with you always. I was with you in the past, I am with you today, I will be with you all your future days.”

If you do a Bible study, you will find that very often when the Lord says to His people, “Do not be afraid,” He also gives this promise, “I am with you” (e.g. Deuteronomy 31:6; Joshua 1:9; Psalm 23:4; Psalm 118:6; Isaiah 41:10; Mark 6:49-50; Luke 1:30-31; Hebrews 13:6).

You’ll never know if Jesus has the power to help you until you really need His help. Put in another way: You’ll never know if Jesus is with you until you decide to go somewhere in His name.

And that’s how the Christian movement started with 11 men, some of whom doubted, and has since grown to over 2 billion people today.¹

1. <http://www.npr.org/sections/thetwo-way/2015/04/02/397042004/muslim-population-will-surpass-christians-this-century-pew-says>

Some 2,000 years later, Jesus is still saying to us today, “Go for I have all power. Go for I will go with you.”

And when Jesus gets involved, incredible things happen. But before that, the Lord’s people (you and I) must be willing to be involved as well—stand up, open our palms, surrender our five loaves and two fish, and SEE how the Lord will bless and use our obedience.

Conclusion

Today is not the very first time you hear a sermon on the Great Commission. In it you also hear the Great Promise of the Lord: “Go for I have all power. Go for I will go with you.”

But until and unless we go in obedience to the Great Commission, the promise of the Lord’s power and presence will still remain just that—a promise and nothing more.

It is only when we go in obedience that this promise of the Lord’s power and presence will actually become a reality. It is not merely great, but it is truly real!

Would you choose today to go for Jesus so that you can live from the realm of promise to the realm of fulfilment because when you go in obedience, you realize that the promise of His power and presence with you is REAL!

Simon Peter learnt that the Lord could make him walk on waters not merely by believing with all his heart, but still remaining in the boat. He learnt that by stepping out of the boat and walking on waters, and realized by first-hand experience that even if he should sink, the all powerful and ever present hand of the Lord would make him stand again.

Looking around, some of us may say, “So sad ... we are only a small church of Christians here.” Some others may even doubt, “Can we really make a difference?”

But Jesus says to us today, “No worries. I’m more powerful than anything you can run into. I’m going with you wherever you go. You’re not on your own.”

So, do not mock the days of small things because when Jesus gets involved in our going and doing, incredible things happen.

In 1912, medical missionary Dr. William Leslie went to live and minister to tribal people in a remote corner of the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

He and his wife (Clara) cleared enough of the leopard-infested jungle along the Kwilu River at Vanga for a new mission station perched on a small plateau. Some of the villages surrounding Vanga were still practicing cannibalism at that time.

After 17 years he returned to the U.S. a discouraged man, believing that he failed to make an impact for Christ. He died nine years after his return.

But in 2010, a team led by adventurer-evangelist, Eric Ramsey, made a sensational discovery. They found a network of reproducing churches among the Yansi people hidden like glittering diamonds in the dense jungle across the Kwilu River from Vanga, where Dr. Leslie was once stationed.

Based on his previous research, Ramsey thought the Yansi people in this remote area might have some exposure to the name of Jesus, but no real understanding of who He is. He and his team were totally surprised by their remarkable find.

Ramsey writes, “When we got in there, we found a network of reproducing churches throughout the jungle. Each village had its own gospel choir. They wrote their own songs and would sing these from village to village.”

They found a church in each of the eight villages they visited scattered across 34 miles. Ramsey and his team even found a 1000-seat stone church in one of the villages. He learned that this church got so crowded in the 1980s—with many walking miles to attend—that a church planting movement began in the surrounding villages.

Apparently, Dr. William Leslie crossed the Kwilu River once a year from Vanga and spent a month travelling through the jungle. He would teach the Bible and the tribal children how to read and write; He would talk about the importance of education; He would tell Bible stories.

William Leslie and his wife spent 17 years at Vanga, but their service ended on a rocky note. He had a relational falling out with some of the tribal leaders and was asked not to come back. However, they did reconcile later; there were apologies and forgiveness, but it didn’t end like he hoped.

William Leslie’s goal was to spread Christianity in where God had called him. But upon his return to the US, he felt like he was there for 17 years and he never really made a big impact. But unknown to him, the legacy he left behind today is huge.

Again I say, “Do not mock the days of small things or beginnings.”

(<https://www.preachingtoday.com/illustrations/2016/june/2062716.html>)

The last words of Jesus in the Gospel of Matthew are His marching orders to His disciples—to go out there, to bring people to God, and to make disciples out of them. So, discipleship is more than just growing and sticking together among ourselves, waiting for Christ's coming again. It also calls on us to be a going church for a coming Christ.

Today, where is the Lord calling you to go in His name, and do something for the Gospel sake? It can be somewhere in Singapore or somewhere beyond. But the important thing is this—you obey the going part, and let God order the growing part.

I planted my feet in Yangon for the very first time in my life on 15 Aug 2012. I went with someone whom I was still trying to know better at that point in time (Dave Kriner). He brought me to visit the different ministries that the Lord had led him to help establish in Yangon—a village church with a children's centre, a paddy field, a Bible college to equip people for full-time ministry, and another church in the city area. Those who greeted me in these places were all strangers to me then.

I told the Lord, "Lord, my eyes and my ears are open. Help me to see and hear what you are doing here. And let me sense what you are calling me to do."

The Lord put a desire in my heart to help meet the needs of the Bible college. It was small school with very humble facilities and located right in the heart of a Buddhist village.

Four years later in December 2016, I went to Yangon again for the 15th time. This time, I went with eight other people from my home church. I told my fellow church members, "Those who greeted us in the places we visited are no longer strangers to me anymore. They are now like members of my spiritual family in Yangon."

What have I learnt? I have learnt that when I obey the Lord and go, He is with me and He is using me, even in a seemingly insignificant place and position. I have learnt that when I obey the Lord and go, I will experience biblical promises translated into life realities.

Pray that the Lord will help us move from merely believing biblical promises to experiencing life realities because we find that He is truly with us as we obey His calling and go in His name.

Amen!