Does the world really need the *Great Commission*? Well known *London Times* columnist Matthew Parris, an atheist who grew up in the African country of Malawi, returned after 45 years and offered these observations - "As an atheist I truly believe that Africa needs God: missionaries, not aid money, are the solution to Africa’s biggest problem - the crushing passivity of the people's mindset. Traveling in Malawi refreshed another belief, too: one I've been trying to banish all my life, but an observation I've been unable to avoid since my African childhood. It confounds my ideological beliefs, stubbornly refuses to fit my worldview, and has embarrassed my grown belief that there is no God.

“Now a confirmed atheist, I've become convinced of the enormous contribution that Christian evangelism makes in Africa: sharply distinct from the work of secular NGOs, government projects and international aid efforts. These alone will not do. Education and training alone will not do. In Africa Christianity changes people's hearts. It brings a spiritual transformation. The rebirth is real. The change is good.

“I used to avoid this truth by applauding - as you can - the practical work of mission churches in Africa. It's a pity, I would say, that salvation is part of the package, but Christians black and white, working in Africa, do heal the sick, do teach people to read and write; and only the severest kind of secularist could see a mission hospital or school and say the world would be better without it.

“Those who want Africa to walk tall amid the 21st-century global competition must not kid themselves that providing the material means or even the knowhow that accompanies what we call development will make the change. A whole belief system must first be supplanted.

“And I'm afraid it has to be supplanted by another. Removing Christian evangelism from the African equation may leave the continent at the mercy of a malign fusion of Nike, the witch doctor, the mobile phone and the machete."¹

Africa needs the Great Commission – but I fear we live in a time that is similar to Judges 2:10 – after Joshua died at 110, we find, “All that generation also were gathered to their fathers; and there arose another generation after them who did not know the Lord, nor yet the work which He had done for Israel.” (NASB) – we know the words of the Great Commission – we know where it is found – but we are in danger of losing our biblical commitment to the Great Commission – let’s look at this familiar passage again

**I. A COMPELLING CALL**

Setting – after Jesus’ resurrection – the astounded disciples were trying to move from three years of learning and living with Jesus – they saw His life – they were astounded by His miracles – thought He was Messiah – then He died! – their hopes and dreams crashed! – now three days later He’s back – with a message! – Matthew 28:18 – “All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth.” (NASB) – no higher appeal – no need for written approval – don’t have to check with anyone – Matthew 28:19 – “Go therefore and make disciples . . .”

**A. What does “go” mean?**

Seems too simple – “go” implies leaving – not staying or waiting – the work of Christians is not to sit and soak in Church – there is a going aspect about the life of the church in making disciples

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“make disciples” is the main verb – an imperative – “go” is a participle – “as you are going” – 15 times in New Testament – every time it is translated in the participial form as “go” it is used with an imperative main verb – “the mood of the main verb casts its shadow over the participle of attendant circumstance so that when the participle introduces an imperative it gains an imperatival force as well . . .It means that no ancient Greek would take it to mean “as you go, disciple the nations” – the main point is that the nations will never become disciples if we don’t go!

The work of the church is to edify the saints – already saved – but Jesus did not tell us to “stay” or “rest” or “remain” or “retreat” – He said “Go” – implies evangelism and discipleship as a part of life

B. Who goes?

“Go” and “make disciples” are both plural – given to all true disciples of Christ – some say this was for disciples only – not us – ultra-dispensationalists who say we are under dispensation of the church so we are only bound by Paul on – not Jesus – funny – they will accept His work on the cross for their salvation, but won’t accept any instruction He gives to His disciples

But Jesus says we are to “…make disciples of all the nations . . .teaching them to observe all that I commanded you…” (Matthew 28:19-20) – He meant this for us – and no one is excluded – does not say “pastors” or “elders” or “seminary graduates” or “missionaries” – what does this mean? – are we all to be “missionaries?” – no – if everyone “went” to a foreign country, no one would be left to send them – and no one would be here when missionaries came to us!

But some are to go – leave their home, their families, their country, their language group, their emotional support system – all for the sake of the gospel – Romans 10:14-15 – some will go and some will send – “How then will they call on Him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching? And how are they to preach unless they are sent? As it is written, ‘How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news!’” – the task is the same for all of us:
*For those who stay, we are to “go” to our community and support those who “go” to unreached peoples
*For those who “go” – they are to go with the express purpose of sharing the gospel with the unsaved

C. Where do we go?

Go where? – across the street? – next city? – next state? – Canada? – Mexico? – Africa? – Djibouti? – answer? – anywhere there are unsaved – but we must prioritize – Paul founded many churches across Asia Minor – but he was always stretching the boundaries to those who had never heard – Acts 18:6 – finally at Corinth the Jews “…opposed and reviled him, he shook out his garments and said to them, ‘Your blood be on your own heads! I am innocent. From now on I will go to the Gentiles.”

Vast cultural differences – Jews were monotheistic – Romans had all kinds of gods – Jews were subservient to Rome – Rome was powerful – Jews looked for signs of coming Messiah – Romans valued earthly wisdom and power – Jews viewed Rome with contempt for their autocratic ways – Romans viewed Jews as weird religious sect – couldn’t have been any more different

Romans 1:5 – Paul called to the Gentiles – could have had a “Jonah attitude” – let them go to hell – “they don’t care about me and I don’t care about them” – but he didn’t – Romans 1:14 – “I am under obligation both to Greeks and to barbarians, both to the wise and to the foolish.” – Greeks were the social elites – trained in Greek philosophy and culture – valued wisdom and culture – all non-Greeks were “barbarians” to Greeks – thought anyone who didn’t speak their language was inferior – said they sound like “bar-bar-bar” – so they called all non-Greeks “barbarians” – non-educated, foolish people – what would your reaction be?

Romans 1:15,16 – “‘So I am eager to preach the gospel to you also who are in Rome. For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.’”
Paul had an insatiable desire to go wherever he could and do whatever he needed to do to bring the gospel to all who had not heard it – Romans 15 – he refers to “Gentiles” nine times from Romans 15:9-18 – Romans 15:20-21 – “And thus I aspired to preach the gospel, not where Christ was already named, so that I would not build on another man’s foundation; but as it is written, ‘They who had no news of Him shall see, And they who have not heard shall understand.’” (NASB) – Paul prioritized his work to go to those who had not heard

Is this a transferable principle? – it must be if we believe that we are to “disciple the nations” – if the church is already formed in a culture it is “reached” in the sense that a gospel witness is there – but if there are no churches – no witness – no turning to Christ because there is no proclamation, how can we rest knowing that they have never heard!? – NorthCreek focus on Kazakhstan – in process of prioritizing missions – focus on Bible translation – evangelism and church planting in unreached countries – less than 2% Christians

II. A CLEAR COMMISSION

A. The call

Commission is clear – “make disciples of all the nations” – not hard to understand – imperative – “disciple” – matheus – not “believers” – not “church goers” – “Christians” – but “disciples” – word means “learner” – “to learn” – “thought accompanied by endeavor” – it is not just receiving information – it is someone who learns and then puts it into practice – the most complete picture of a true Christian – difference between “teaching” someone to swim with a lecture utilizing pictures and illustrations – or throwing them in the deep end of the pool! – that’s “discipleship” – a disciple knows that he knows Jesus! – knows what salvation means – knows how to pray, trust the Holy Spirit, resolve conflict, live for Christ

1. Baptize

Nothing to us – in Jesus’ time no one did this – it was the mark of a true disciple – being baptized meant leaving pagan gods to follow Jesus! – same today – can get you killed in Saudi Arabia!

Clear indication of the call – if you don’t have anyone to baptize, you might not be doing missions – further – those who are baptized form a church – the first sign of a church in New Testament – groups that don’t evangelize and form churches are not fulfilling the Great Commission

2. Teach

The ultimate command of disciple-making is “teaching them to observe all that I commanded you” – not an abbreviated booklet about how to live the victorious Christian life – it is everything Jesus taught – the whole Bible – Matthew 5 – Jesus did not come to abolish one little bit of the law – Luke 24:27 – on the road to Emmaus with distraught disciples “…beginning with Moses and with all the prophets, He explained to them the things concerning Himself in all the Scriptures.” (NASB) – explained Messiah from Old Testament

Any missions venture that does not have as its main goal the evangelization of the lost and the teaching of the whole counsel of God is not missions – Bible translation is a predecessor to that – humanitarian and support efforts are the result of that

B. The conflict

Missions has changed drastically in last 50 years – liberal churches have gutted the meaning of the gospel by denying divinity of Christ – but we are now seeing serious “Evangelical mission drift” – the thrust of the Great Commission is being changed

Began in 1960s – “church growth” leaders at Fuller Seminary – founded by evangelist Charles Fuller in 1947 – abandoned inerrancy of Scripture on “Black Saturday” in December 1962 – led to drift that departed from biblical teaching in variety of subjects including missions – Donald McGavran, founding professor of the School of World Mission at Fuller, led the way – people come to Christ as part of a “homogeneous” people group – therefore,
“missional” methods are necessary to appeal to unbelieving people groups—missionaries should not make a gospel appeal to an individual, but elicit responses from groups of people—changed nomenclature from missions to missional and missiologists2

Mantra picked up by Eddie Gibbs, senior professor of Church Growth in the School of Intercultural Studies at Fuller Seminary—strong advocate for study of postmodern culture and the Emerging Church through the Brehm Center for Worship and Arts located at Fuller—boasts of hosting all the prominent leaders of the Emergent Church “discussion” led by Brian McLaren—wrote book with Ryan Bolger of Fuller called Emerging Churches—“Emerging churches became increasingly dissatisfied with using the Bible in a modern way... Emerging church leaders are under no compulsion to stand up and fight for truth...Standing up for the fight or fighting the culture wars has no appeal to Emerging church leaders.”3 In a public address at Golden Gate Seminary in 2009 he said, “One must dismantle the old, clear the way, before one builds something new...it is what the apostle Paul really meant after being deconstructed and reconstructed...God communicates with humanity, not primarily through the form of propositions but through a story illustrated by parables, riddles, sayings, and folk songs...We don’t dismiss the cross, it is a central part. But the good news is not that He died but that the kingdom has come...The focus of the Emerging churches on the gospel of the kingdom as distinct from a gospel of salvation has produced a new ecclesiology.”4 And what is this ecclesiology?—“The church itself will need to go through a metamorphosis in order to find its new identity in the dialectic of gospel and culture. This new situation is requiring churches to approach their context as a ‘missional’ encounter.”5

The “Evangelical mission drift” grew in the 90s—small group of Christian leaders began meeting around mutual conviction that evangelicalism had produced a subculture that was no longer the best representation of Christianity—felt church needed renovation to stay abreast of cultural changes or we would lose coming generation—group was comprised of pastors Brian McLaren, Tony Jones, Todd Hunter, Chris Seay, Sally Morgenthaler, and scholars like Len Sweet, Stanley Grenz, N. T. Wright, Robert Webber, and Dallas Willard6—Leadership Network (group founded by Bob Buford, a TV executive from Tyler, Texas, formed to encourage pastors to meet and discuss issues without an agenda)—began consulting with Peter Drucker, business management consultant who believed that society could be changed through community engineering centered around three vital sectors: 1) a public sector of effective governments; 2) a private sector of effective businesses; and 3) a social sector of effective community organizations—but Drucker is not a Christian—“I am not a Christian. I went to church and tithed. But no, I am not a Christian...”7—influenced by Swiss existential theologian Soren Kierkegaard (the cross and resurrection don’t exist in the real world of time and space) Zen, Confucianism, and postmodern thinking—when Buford founded Leadership Network in 1995 there were 1000 mega churches in US—Drucker and Buford began coaching mega church pastors—movement erupted—by 2009 there were 5,000 mega churches in US8—movement of God or patterned after management guru Peter Drucker?

One of the mega churches that exploded in the 80s and 90s was Saddleback Church led by Rick Warren—in 2005 he announced his PEACE plan to mobilize the American church to tackle five problems so big that even United Nations can’t handle them—“Our goal will be to enlist ‘one billion foot soldiers for the Kingdom of God,’ who will permanently change the face of international missions to take on these five “global giants” for which the church can become the ultimate distribution and change agent to overcome Spiritual Emptiness, Self-serving Leadership, Poverty, Disease and ignorance (or illiteracy),”—PEACE plan—1) Plant churches (changed to “Promote reconciliation” in 2007)—2) Equip servant leaders—3) Assist the poor—4) Care for the sick—5) Educate the next generation—from 2004-2008 Warren sent 8,000 people from 12 churches to 68 countries with his message—in

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2 Paul Smith, New Evangelicalism, 107.
4 Ibid., 175, 70, 48.
5 Dr. Edmund Gibbs, speaking at annual meeting of the American Society For Church Growth at Golden Gate Seminary, Mill Valley, CA, November 12-14, 2009.
8 Ibid., 145.

NorthCreek CHURCH

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May 2008 he gathered 1700 pastors to report of his “beta-testing” or the project – *Time Magazine* reported, “If last week’s conference increases the number of participant congregations in the PEACE plan from 12 to 1,200 — a reasonable estimate, given that 1,700 pastors were in attendance and many actually head networks of congregations — then the number of PEACE missionaries would jump from roughly 2,000 a year to 200,000, vaulting the network to the forefront of the missionary field. . . The PEACE program is an attempt to radically re-engineer Evangelicalism’s huge missionary culture, connecting individual churches in the U.S. to congregations in target countries rather than funneling aid and evangelism through agencies that send trained professionals into the field.”\(^9\) — gained the endorsement of variety of people, including President Bush, John McCain, Bono – Billy Graham called it the “greatest, most comprehensive and most biblical vision for world missions I’ve ever heard or read about.”\(^10\)

Is this true? Is this missions? – problems – 1) There aren’t one billion biblical Christians in the world – not to worry – he will cooperate with liberals, Muslims, even atheists to reach his goals – 2) God didn’t call us to solve the five biggest problems in the world – has he read Revelations to see how it ends? – 3) The plan mimics the thoughts and desires of Peter Drucker, his mentor over past 20 years – drastic effect on true missions – to suggest that we replace the gospel message with an economic, political, and quasi-church plan that includes liberal churches, Catholics, Muslims, Hindus, Confucianists, and atheists boggles the mind!

These influences dilute the propositional truth of doctrines of sin, man, salvation, and diminishes the value of the cross and the fire for missions

### III. A CONFIDENT COMMITMENT

Matthew 28:20 – “...And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.” – why is that important? – because true missions has always involved suffering and many times martyrdom – our commander in chief was martyred for his faith – so were all the disciples except John – so was Paul – Matthew 10:21-23 – basic concepts apply to every believer the Lord sends out into ministry – “Brother will deliver brother over to death, and the father his child, and children will rise against parents and have them put to death, and you will be hated by all for my name’s sake. But the one who endures to the end will be saved. When they persecute you in one town, flee to the next, for truly, I say to you, you will not have gone through all the towns of Israel before the Son of Man comes.” – those who give themselves to world evangelization in the unreached areas of the world will pay a price – it could be the ultimate price of martyrdom

These are the pictures of three modern day martyrs – killed in Turkey in 2007 – Tilman Geske, Nacati Aydin, and Ugur Yuksel – held a Bible Study with five “seekers” at a printing company – read a passage of Scripture then were attacked – Tilman was stabbed 156 times, Nicati 99 times, Ugur too many to count – disemboweled, emasculated, fingers cut off, mouths and noses slashed – throats finally slashed from ear to ear – they tried to prevent Tilman from being buried – spread rumor that it was a sin to dig a grave for a Christian – his Christian brothers grabbed shovels and dug his grave – his wife Susanne was interviewed on TV – didn’t want revenge – “Oh God forgive them for they know not what they do.” In a country where blood for blood revenge is normal, many reports have come back that those words have changed lives – one columnist wrote, “She said in one sentence what 1000 missionaries in 1000 years could never do.”

\(^9\) *Time Magazine*, May 27, 2008.

\(^10\) Ibid.
Who will go to take their place? – you? – me? – who? – if you want more info call Justin – get educated – ask God! – taking the gospel to the unsaved is never an easy task in any culture – it’s because Satan has a grip on the hearts of man and he doesn’t want to lose it – but if we don’t go – who will? – remember Jesus’ words in Matthew 28: 20–
“...I am with you always, even until the end of the age.”

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. What do you think about when you hear the word “missions”?
2. What does Jesus mean by “Go…” in Matthew 28:19?
3. What can missionaries expect to face according to Matthew 10:21-23?
4. What might we learn about where to go in missions from Romans 15:20-21?
5. What is the confident commitment given to us in Matthew 28:20?
6. What can you do to fulfill the Great Commission?