

Lesson 9: The Great Commission (1 Peter 2:9-10)

We will continue to study Foundations Class. This is the last lesson, no. 9.

We believed in Jesus and were saved, we were born again, became Christian and started new life. What does it actually mean to us? We say “new life”, but how do we actually live this new life? God has a purpose for our new life. There is a reason for our salvation. We are redeemed for a special mission. The title of today's lesson is “The Great Commission.”

1. Mission of people who are saved

2 Cor. 5:17

Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!

I don't think there is anyone who doesn't like this verse. We will not be at the mercy of our old life contaminated with sin. We were made new. We don't have to be troubled by our past painful experiences, our mistakes, pains, angers and grudges. We can be set free from them. "If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation." Absolutely! Here is the power of the Gospel! But it doesn't end here. It continues.

2 Cor. 5:18-19

¹⁸ All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: ¹⁹ that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation.

After we were reconciled with God, we don't just sit there idly in God's grace. Jesus did not die on the cross so that we may from time to time gather together, sing songs, pray, read the Bible and eat together. Yes, we will do those things, but that's not all, there is more for new life. We are given the ministry of reconciliation. The message of reconciliation is committed to us.

1 Peter 2:9

But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.

This verse clearly shows who we are as those who live new life, and what mission God entrusts with us.

God first gave us salvation, and sent us to the world as examples of salvation, the power of the gospel. We may proclaim the praises of Him who called us out of darkness into His marvellous light.

2. People who encounter Jesus

When people encounter Jesus, or receive Jesus into their lives, or are saved by Jesus, they begin to live a new life.

In Luke 19, Zacchaeus is the typical case. His life had been driven by money. When he invited Jesus into his life, his attitude toward money was completely changed. It is clear that he now had different direction of life from before.

In John 4, the woman at Jacob's well is another case. She came to the well to draw water. But right after she talked to Jesus and was told that he was the Christ, her direction of life was changed. "Then, leaving her water jar, the woman went back to the town and said to the people, 'Come, see a man who told me everything I ever did. Could this be the Messiah?' (John 4:28-29)" I believe her leaving her water jar symbolizes the fact that she received living water from Jesus, and sharing about Jesus to others indicates the fact that living water is welling up from her (John 7:38).

Christians have experienced God's grace and have communion with God, and they live new life as God's redeemed people living in this world.

David Bosch agrees with John Stott's definition of mission as "being the total task that God has set the church for the salvation of the world."¹ So, mission is more than just activities of church or projects of organization, but it is about *being*, or "our existence as God's redeemed people living in the world."² The message is revealed in our life. Our life, how we live is the ministry of reconciliation (2 Cor 5:18-20).

3. Missional life

Zacchaeus and the woman at the well became God's redeemed people, and then they naturally started to be involved in mission. Notice that Jesus did not give them any instructions. I believe that by the power of the Gospel, they

¹ David Bosch, "Evangelism: Theological currents and cross-currents today" in *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* (July 1987): (100)

² Graeme Goldsworthy, *According to Plan*, Inter-Varsity Press (1991): (29)

started to live new life, which is the natural response to his love and which is driven by the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is given to a born-again Christian. “We have the mind of Christ (1 Cor. 2:16)”, and as a natural result, their lives become missional.

I believe that the Great Commission is not the duty of Christians, but rather it is God's invitation for us to join his work of redemption, reconciliation and transformation. In that sense, taking part in mission is not the matter of obedience, but it is a new life style as God's redeemed people, it is the natural response when we experience God's amazing love, and it is unstoppable desire driven by the Holy Spirit.³

Imagine that you are engaged to be married. You met a wonderful person who is more than ideal and now you are waiting for the wedding day. Through emails, over the phone, and whenever you meet each other, you talk about your new life together. Day by day, you feel your love for each other grows deeper, and you are full of happiness and joy.

However, you noticed that the person you are engaged doesn't talk about you and his relationship with you to anyone else. He doesn't talk about it to his family, his friends, his colleagues or anyone. When people ask him about his relationship, he still doesn't answer clearly and try to avoid talking about it. But when he meets you, he is always eager to talk to you and listen to you.

One day, you happen to see him happily chatting with another girl whom you don't know. And the girl asked him “Are you going out with anyone?” Without any doubt, you thought he would talk about you. But you were shocked to hear him say, “No. I'm free.”

And to your greater surprise, when you met him the next time, he was as sweet as before toward you. He even composed a love song for you and sang it for you.

Jesus loved us. He died on the cross in our place and gave us salvation and invited us to remain in his love. If we, who are in His love, don't talk about Him to others, it is very strange, really un-natural. No matter how often we say "I love you, Jesus", there is something wrong with the relationship. "Practices show the real meaning of words."⁴ The lives of all Christians should be missional. Our lives are supposed to have fragrance of love, the love of God and the love for God.

³ "There is indeed an obligation involved, but it is never a matter of obedience to a command. His action made the apostles witnesses. The initiator, the active agent, is the Lord who is the Spirit. The apostolic preaching is not an act of obedience to an order: it is a witness, a testifying, a pointing to the source of happenings, events, actions, which are otherwise inexplicable." Lesslie Newbigin, "Cross-currents in Ecumenical and Evangelical understandings of Mission" in *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* (October 1982): (147)

⁴ Bernard T. Adeney, *Strange Virtues – Ethics in a Multicultural World* –, Inter Varsity Press (1995): (114)

4. It is given to all Christians

John 20:21

Again Jesus said, "Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you."

Matt. 28:18-20

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

You don't fulfill this great commission alone. We, this church alone, cannot lead people all over the world, or even all over this country to Christ. You alone cannot lead people all over this city, or you may not lead even one person to Christ. That's okay. Great commission is given to all His disciples. It will be accomplished by all Jesus' followers.

In other words, each one of us, you and you and you and I, takes on an important role in this great commission. No one should be a passive observer. All Christians should be participators.

Think about it. How many people took part in leading you to Christ? Some invited you to come to meetings. Others gave testimonies over lunch or dinner. Still others lend you books or CDs. You might not have responded to the Gospel then. You might have felt the person's talk fishy. You might not have been interested in the books or CDs. But you can still remember those incidents now, because they made some impact on you. Those incidents piled up one by one, and as a result you were led to Christ. You have come to know Christ, because each one of them was a participator, taking on their roles in the great commission.

You may be familiar with the parable of sowing seed (Mark 4:3-8). The seed are the same seed, but only those which fell on good soil came up, grew and produced a crop. No matter how much seed we sow on the path, rocky places, or among thorns, it doesn't work. If we want a harvest, we can't just sow the seed anywhere. First we need to plough the soil. It is hard work. It may be boring. It may not seem that you are doing anything productive. But there is no harvest without it. And do you know the essential key for harvest? That is, to harvest. If we just sow, we never have harvest!

Now, it is our turn to share the Gospel with others for God's harvest. We must start with ploughing their heart. Some lend them books and CDs. Others share their experience with Christ over meals or coffee. Still others invite them

to meetings. They may look annoyed, when you do these things. They may oppose your testimony. They may not immediately get interested in the Bible. But each of these acts is to take away stones from their heart, pull out the weeds from their heart, swing a pickax into the hard soil. Each of them doesn't seem to produce anything. But because of ploughing, the hard heart will turn into good soil and they will start to turn to God's Word and produce a crop. And the time comes when we harvest. And the harvest becomes seeds for the next harvest.

You don't have to think you should do everything from the beginning to the end by yourself, pick up stones, pull out the weeds, plough, sow and harvest on your own. Each of us can do what we can when each of our turn comes. Then, at the harvest, it will be joy for all of us.

Great commission is given to all Jesus' disciples. It will be accomplished by all His followers. In other words, it is not entrusted to each person individually, but it is entrusted to His church.

David Bosch mentions mission has wide areas of ministry: "In its missionary involvement, the church steps out of itself, into the wider world. It crosses all kinds of frontiers and barriers: geographical, social, political, ethnic, cultural, religious, ideological. Into all these areas the church-in-mission carries the message of God's salvation."⁵

No need to say it is impossible that one Christian or one church takes all those areas of ministry or covers all geographical areas in the world. And it is not necessary to do everything alone. But whatever ministry we do, every ministry should carry the message of God's salvation, redemption and reconciliation.

God created each person different, so he uses each person uniquely. God also made each church different, so he uses each church uniquely. "For it is God who works in you to will and to act in order to fulfill his good purpose. (Phi. 2:13)" God takes initiative of mission.

I like very much the definition of mission David Bosch gives: Mission "means being involved in the redemption of the universe and the glorification of God."⁶

We are taking a part of the redemption of the universe and the glorification of God. In other words, mission of God's redeemed people relates to the kingdom of God where whole universe is redeemed and renewed, and filled with glory of God. It is the uniqueness and characteristic of Christian mission.

⁵ Ibid. Bosch, "Evangelism", (100)

⁶ Ibid. Bosch, "Evangelism", (100)

Christian mission relates to the kingdom of God. "The kingdom comes by the Holy Spirit taking the word about Christ into all the world, through the preaching of the disciples."⁷ And preaching or sharing the good news should be supported by the lives of disciples because "Meaning revealed in life."⁸ Disciples' lives present the power of the gospel to the world.

Our lives as God's redeemed people reveal the kingdom of God in the world. The lives of all Christians should be missional. Our lives are supposed to reflect the truth of God and glory of God.

5. The price paid in order for the Gospel to reach us

Acts shows that the Gospel spread through Antioch, Asia, Europe and to the end of the world (Acts 8:1, 4, 9:31, 19:20).

The Gospel expanded under persecutions. Early Christians were minority. In those days, they could have easier life in the society if they hide their faith in Christ. Some Christians could not stay in Jerusalem any longer because of their faith. Some were put in prison. Some were executed. But they didn't stop witnessing for Jesus. From person to person, from city to city, from nation to nation the Gospel has been proclaimed. And local churches didn't stop being church. They continue to live up to the mission given to churches: preaching the gospel, making disciples, and being joined and held together to build up his body, church. As a result, we could also hear the Gospel. If they stopped witnessing for Jesus, if they became silent witnesses, secret Christians, the Gospel may have not been shared with you. Or you may have received something quite different and powerless.

Why did Jesus come to this sinful world, leaving all His glory as God behind in heaven? Luke 19:10 says "For the Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost." And, Christians have the mind of Christ (1 Cor. 2:16). The church is the body of Christ. Early churches remain to be church. So the Gospel was proclaimed to us. Early Christians didn't stop being Christian. So the world could see the power of the Gospel. That is how the Gospel reached us.

My wife and I were in Vietnam for almost 11 years. Sometimes we visited the highlands, the ethnic minority areas. I met one ethnic minority pastor who is about my age. Now I call him Tom. Tom ministered among ethnic minorities in a huge area where his father used to be a pastor. He shared a lot of stories with me. I can't remember all, but I was so impressed, especially about his testimony of his first time in prison. It changed my understanding about sharing the Gospel.

⁷ Ibid. Goldsworthy, *According to Plan*, (213)

⁸ Ibid. Adeney, *Strange Virtues*, (52)

Pastor Tom was caught by police because he preached. He was beaten by the policemen and they forced other prisoners to hit him too. He was put into prison. He cried out on a bench, because he was so hurt physically and emotionally. He asked God why he had to suffer so much. God didn't answer him immediately. He'd been in prison for 1 week. While he was in prison, he shared the Gospel with other prisoners and one of them accepted Jesus as his Lord and savior.

After he was released, he served God like before. One day, the man Tom led to Jesus in prison came to his church meeting. The man gave a testimony of how he was saved and shared some verses which he memorized in prison.

While listening to his testimony, Tom suddenly understood that the pain he suffered in prison was the cost he must pay to share the Gospel with that man.

The cross has a beautiful shape. However, it's a tool for death penalty which gives extreme physical pain and the worst humiliation. The Gospel simply means Jesus took all the pain on the cross instead of all human, all sinners. We are not able to express the reality of the Gospel without paying the cost. That was what he understood and he shared it with me.

The life of Jesus, that is the price paid to save us, you and me. And, the sacrifice which countless Christians have made, starting with early Christians, for the last 2000 years, which was the cost paid for us to hear the Gospel. For us, you and me to be saved, that much cost was paid. Salvation is grace. The righteousness of God is a gift. However, huge cost was paid for this wonderful news to be delivered to us, you and me. And we, church have been given a mission.

For closing, I'd like to share one story from the book titled "No Compromise."⁹

There was a man whose job was to raise and lower a drawbridge so passenger trains could cross a deep canyon. This man had one child, a son, whom he loved very much. One day the little boy wandered toward the bridge without his father noticing.

Soon the father heard a train whistle. As he started to pull the lever to lower the bridge, he looked out the window and saw that his little son had crawled down into the big heavy gears. If he pulled the lever his son would be crushed!

There were only seconds to decide. Hundreds of people would die if he didn't lower the bridge. He took a deep breath and his heart screaming with pain, he pulled the lever.

⁹ Melody Green, *No Compromise: The Life Story of Keith Green*, Thomas Nelson, 1989

The bereaved father stood helplessly at the window, beating on it with both fists and screaming out in anguish, as the train zipped quickly over the bridge. The passengers saw him and thought he was waving - so they waved happily back without realizing the price that father had just paid for them. ("The Bridge"¹⁰)

The Father God sacrificed the only Son Jesus to save us, sinners, enemies of Him. The life of Jesus is the price for our salvation. This fact makes us think seriously about how we should live, what is the purpose of our new life.

"This is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son *to be* the propitiation for our sins. (1 John 4:10)"

"You *are* a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvellous light; (1 Peter 2: 9)"

¹⁰ <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BPysEqJIXrs>