

Matthew 28:18-20:

A Sovereign Mandate,
A Great Commission,
An Unbreakable Union,
A Conditional Promise!

By Daniel Kenaston

I believe that all of us have experienced the joy of an old hymn we have sung dozens of times suddenly springing to life in a new way in our hearts through a fresh revelation of its meaning. All of us also need this from time to time with some of the most familiar passages in Scripture. We know some of these Scriptures quite well, and most of us could quote them from memory. But sometimes, instead of being the life-changing portions that God intended them to be, they have simply become childhood memory verses. They seem to have lost their power through our comfortable knowledge of them.

Recently, God reopened the very familiar portion at the end of the book of Matthew to my heart with some new insights and applications. I would like to share some of these with you. Hopefully, we can stir each other up through these meditations. Possibly some of you will also be reawakened by the strong import of these familiar but powerful verses.

A Sovereign Mandate

"...All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth" (Matthew 28:18).

Jesus begins His all-powerful last words with a claim or statement of royal sovereignty over the whole of heaven and earth. He says,

"And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, 'All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. Amen'"
(Matthew 28:18-20).



"All the authority has been given to *Me*, making *Me* the ultimate ruler of all that happens within this realm."

Many kings have claimed the right to rule over great countries. At times, great kings have actually ruled up to 25% of the world. But here, Jesus states that He is the *only* power or final authority over the entirety of not only the earth but heaven also! Surely, with an opening statement of this kind of importance, we should be keenly interested in what will follow.

Consider the context of these words: Jesus is on a mountain with His disciples, giving His final words before being taken back into heaven. The King is leaving; the physical presence of the Sovereign will no longer be on the earth. Yet, even as He leaves, He lays claim once again to the entirety of the land He is about to leave! He says, in effect, "Disciples, all power has been given to *Me*, but *you* are the ones to work out my sovereign mandate in this world."

Like some of the great kings of the past, Jesus hereby plants His flag in the ground, laying claim to the world. The irony which adds so much to the power of these words in the lives of the disciples is the fact that Jesus is leaving! All of the instructions that follow in the next two verses have their foundation in this fact of Jesus' sovereignty over the whole of heaven and earth. Every application or physical outworking which flows from these words draws its legitimacy from this statement of royal mandate. We dare not move out against the powers of this world with any lesser authority. But with this document of kingship, we can rightfully threaten the principalities of this world and shake the gates of hell with confidence and lawful indignation.

Dear ones, I agree with you that most of the time it appears that anyone *except* Jesus rules this world we live in. These thoughts weaken our resolve to serve the King. But things are rarely as they appear to be, and here it is cer-

tainly true that what we see does not accurately show how things actually stand.

"This is my Father's world, O let me ne'er forget that though the wrong seems oft so strong, God is the Ruler yet... Jesus, who died, shall be satisfied, and earth and heav'n be one." Satan has been vanquished, and he knows it! Moreover, we cannot base our lives on how things appear here, but rather we must build our lives and efforts on the truth of the sovereignty of our King over this entire world. This is my Father's world, and He has made it the Royal Realm of His Son Jesus! Satan may dispute it and man may wrestle against it, but the mandate of Jesus to rule this world and receive glory from it stands unshaken! All power has been given to Him!

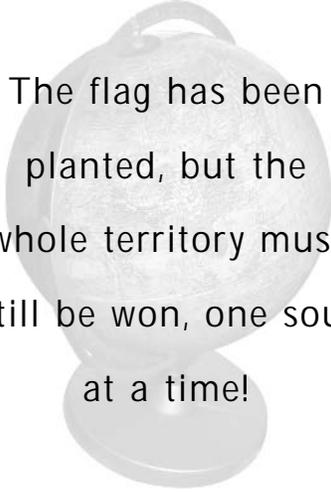
A Great Commission

"Go ye therefore..." (v.19).

It is not easy to look at the subject of Jesus' rightful claim to the throne of the world without jumping to the next thought which so clearly flows out of the first. We draw our imperative to go from the fact of Jesus' rightful ownership over this whole world and every soul in it! If Jesus is the King of this earth, and if we are His willing subjects, and if He has left us in this realm while He goes to another (Heaven), don't we

have some incredible duties here? As His representatives here, we are duty bound to pour our energies into working out in this world the dominion that has been given to Him by God and confirmed by His blood sacrifice for each human being alive.

Jesus owns or has rightful control of this whole world in the heavenly realm "on paper," but Satan continues to control most of the souls Jesus died to redeem through their willing submission to his rule of sin. We must work out in the lives of individual people the work that was already completed at Calvary, in this way bringing into force the dominion of Christ in this world. Hence the "Go!" The



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This idea of people being left behind or sent out to actualize power over an area is not only seen in the spiritual world. It has been repeated time and again in the realm of kings and countries. One notable example is that of Lewis and Clark, who were sent out by the government of the United States to explore and take possession of the great swath of land that America had just purchased from the French. The Louisiana Purchase was the rightful property of the U.S., but most of the land was unexplored and unmapped. Most of the people who lived there had no idea that the authority over them had changed. Lewis and Clark trekked through this vast land, writing reports for the government and informing the tribes and settlers they encountered of the purchase and hence sovereignty change that had taken place. The title deed the U.S. held in Washington was a powerful document, giving America the sole power over its new territory. But that paper alone meant very little until representatives of that government went to the new territory, scouted out their purchase, and informed and enforced their authority upon the people there.

How similar this is to the work we find ourselves engaged in today, working out His kingship here! We draw not only our imperative from Jesus' sovereignty, but also our rationale and legitimacy. Who are we to go around the world, trying to convince other human beings to serve our King, if not because of the fact that He is the rightful ruler of every heart and life on this planet, first by creation and then by redemption?

We dare not go in our own name, but at the same time, we dare not refuse to go in His name! As we labor for His kingdom, we should carry with us a consciousness of the fact that we are in the employ of the only true King. This should thrill, motivate, and strengthen us for

the fight that is sure to continue as we work to win hearts, minds, and allegiance from the imposter to the Living Lord!

An Unbreakable Union

"...Lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the world" (v.20).

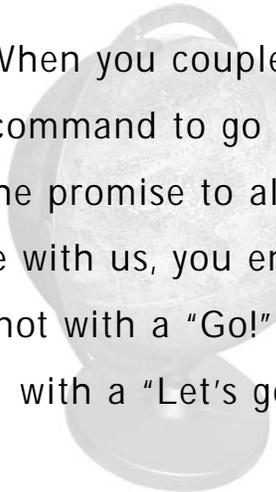
One of the sweetest revelations that opened up this familiar portion to me in a new way came when I was sharing with a group of my Konkomba church leaders. As is often the case, my greatest challenge is trying to present God's Word in a simple format and style so that my young leaders can grasp it. Most of these men cannot read, and almost all of them do not understand English, so I was thinking through

my text in my limited knowledge of the Konkomba language. I realized that to send someone away when you are remaining behind uses one Konkomba word, whereas you use a different word if you are going to accompany the one going. It is the difference of saying to someone "Let's go" as opposed to simply saying "Go."

This simple insight opened up these verses for us leaders in a sweet way, and I hope its simplicity can also bless your heart. This promise of Jesus that He will always be with us is encouraging when viewed all alone, but I

believe you will agree with me that it gains far more power and poignancy when viewed beside the fact that Jesus had just finished sending the disciples to the end of the world! I have always been blessed by this promise, following so closely behind the great sending-out verses just before it. But I have never really meditated on the fact that you cannot send someone to a place where you are yourself going to. When you couple the command to go with the promise to always be with us, you end up not with a "Go!" but with a "Let's go!"

Jesus is not sending us out on this great missionary enterprise alone! He is asking us to



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accompany *Him* as He works to win over hearts and lives to His dominion. Oh, the comfort and power that flows from this promise, this assurance of His presence as we do His work! I said to my men while I was preaching: "As you go back to your villages, I cannot say to you 'Let's go,' because I have to remain here while you go. But Jesus can and will go back with each one of you."

We have become so used to the idea that doing God's work is often a lonely enterprise—and this is often true. But let us not forget that He is not sending us away from His power and presence to labor alone in the darkness; He is asking us to join Him! This promise is sweet in a special way to all who have had to leave family and friends in order to fulfill God's calling of "Go!" in their lives. For us, obeying the call of God has meant a breaking off of almost all the human relationships we knew in order to pursue new ones in the area to which God has called us. It should warm our hearts to recognize that this is one relationship that the Great Commission does not separate! His calling has meant sacrifice and separation from many things, but never from Him. He is the One who has led the way and who accompanies our every effort with His grace and power. As we labor in His Kingdom or work to realize it in new hearts and areas, may we all take courage from the promise He has given to us of an unbreakable union with Him, not affected by time or distance, but steady and sure even to the end of the world!

A Conditional Promise

"Go ye therefore... and lo, I am with you always..." (vv. 19, 20).

Most of the things written above have been of a motivational, encouraging nature, and I mean for them to be just that. But I do feel that we cannot say we have looked at these verses in any depth if we fail to acknowledge the nega-

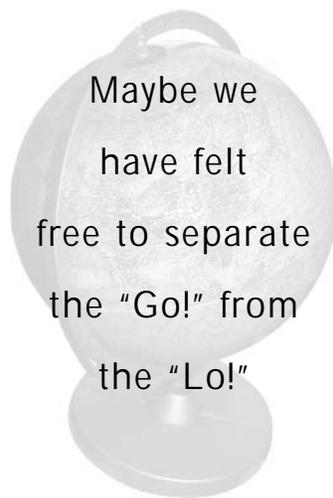
tive element that is inherent in every command, whether human or divine. Every command I give to my children is positive in nature when I give it, and when they obey it, its positive nature is maintained. But if they choose to spurn my words and do the opposite of my command, immediately the negative element of the command comes into play. A command is meant to be obeyed and when it is not obeyed there must be consequences.

Obviously, some will not want to obey the command to "Go!" or Jesus would not have given it. I do not bring up this subject to burden you unnecessarily, but in view of the souls of men and the command of Jesus, we must look at what happens if we refuse the Great Commission that Jesus has given to us. My focus here is what happens to us personally, not the impact on those who do not hear of Christ because of our unwillingness to "Go!"

I would like for us to connect the command to go with the promise to always be with us. I do not want to make a new dogma here, but I do believe that it is correct to state that this promise to be with us is at least partly conditional on our going. That is the context in which it was given, and to misapply it to include those who refuse to go would be an error. I know that there are other verses in which Jesus promises us His presence, but that does not remove the fact that He promises something special here to those who obey His command to go! I am not, lest you think me too narrow, limiting this promise only to

those who leave their native land to preach in another, but the context of this promise does seem to indicate a connection between working for His Kingdom and His special presence.

Before we jump to declare this interpretation too narrow and unbiblical, may we consider that our own belief has been too far on the other side, basically assuring us of our Master's smiling



presence at all times whether or not we obey His last and most powerful command. Surely this cannot be an accurate assessment of these verses or of the heart of God, whose heart bleeds every day for the lost and who spends His time looking around the world for anyone willing to be sent. His other commands all have blessings attending their obedience, and surely this one also must have its special blessing for those who obey. Is this possibly the reason for so little of God's presence in our everyday lives? We long for, pray for, and preach toward having more of His Spirit in our lives, and all the while His promise remains the same as it was when it was given 2000 years ago: "You go, and I will be with you!"

Maybe we have felt free to separate the "Go!" from the "Lo!" and have coddled ourselves to sleep with promises of His presence, while all the time He is waiting for us to "Go!" We cannot say we deserve the promise of the "Lo!" without our own obedience to the command of the "Go!"

Conversely, we will find that as we obey the "Go!" God will make good on His promise of "Lo!" With all of the efforts we put into practicing His presence in our lives and asking Him for a greater infilling, it is surely worth starting to obey this Great Commission. Maybe (or surely!) we will find the secret to living and staying is His presence and blessing. The "Lo!" cannot be separated very far from the "Go!" and the sooner God burns this upon our hearts the better, both for our own spiritual survival and for the teaming millions in the world that still wait.

May these thoughts and familiar verses be used by God to challenge us if we are inactive in His kingdom, encourage us to move forward with boldness if we are already engaged in this work, and fill our hearts with strength through the knowledge of His promised presence with us in this and every day as we work out His dominion and kingship in this world.

