GEOGRAPHY AND JESUS: THE GREAT COMMISSION 4

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Category: Mission

This is the fourth (you'd guessed that by the number) in an occaissional series looking at what is often called The Great Commission; Jesus final charge to his disciples in Matthew 28 and Acts 1.

In the previous post in this series, I demonstrated why I believe thatÂ Matthew 28 and Luke 1 are both records of the same discourse by Jesus, despite the fact that there are some differences between them. In this post, I'd like to highlight the issues that they have in common and then in later posts, I will go on to look at things which are raised by one Evangelist or the other.

Matthew 28:18,20:

> *Jesus came and told his disciples, â€œI have been given all authority in heaven and on earth. Therefore, go and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Teach these new disciples to obey all the commands I have given you. And be sure of this: I am with you always, even to the end of the age.â€*

Acts 1:8

> *But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you. And you will be my witnesses, telling people about me everywhereâ€"in Jerusalem, throughout Judea, in Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.â€*

There are two themes common to both Matthew and Luke's accounts:

- The geographical mandate. Matthew talks about "*all nations"* and Luke says *to the "ends of the earth"*.
- Both mention telling people about Jesus *"teach the to obey all the commands I have given you"* and *"you will be my witnesses".*

There is, perhaps a third commonality; the presence of the Holy Spirit. Luke mentions this overtly, while Matthew talks about Jesus being with us, which could be an allusion to the Spirit. However, in context, Luke talks about the power of the Spirit - obviously pointing to the next chapter in Acts, while Matthew does not have this in view.

Perhaps the most important question to ask at this point is why did both Matthew and Luke both pick up on these two issues and not on the others?

The Geographical Mandate. I think the reason that both of them mentioned the spread of the Gospel around the world is that it was so outrageous to the disciples at the time. Since the day's of Abraham, the people of Israel had seen themselves as the centre of God's attention. They had forgotten, apparently, that they were supposed to be a blessing to every people. Not only that, but Jesus ministry was more or less confined to the Jewish nation, with only a short excursion into

Samaria and the occasional meeting with Gentiles.

Now, on top of this mountain, Jesus gives a mandate to take the Gospel to the whole world, this must have been gobsmacking for the disciples. They were expecting Jesus to restore the kingship to Israel (Acts 1:6), but instead he told them to take the message to the wider world.

Years later, as Matthew and Luke came to write down their accounts, they would have seen the way the Gospel had spread out of the boundaries of Israel and was on its way to being a mainly Gentile movement. Luke, had played a key role in the process.

I wold suggest that the difference in wording between Matthew's account and Luke's is not significant; though Luke clearly uses this as an introduction to point out how the Gospel will spread in the next few chapters of his work.

Telling People about Jesus. This is quite simply the centre of the Christian faith. Pointing people to Jesus and his reconciling work on the cross is at the heart of any form of Christian mission. However, this was also a radical departure for the disciples. They had been brought up as good Jews and if 'evangelism' had been part of their lives they would have told people about Moses, the covenant and the law. Jesus is effectively saying that he has replaced, or fulfilled all that they had previously counted important and that his disciples should simply tell people about him and to obey his commands.

I reckon that sometimes we complicate mission. It isn't about strategies and movements and all that stuff. It's about telling people, wherever we are, about Jesus.