



Congregational Missional Bible Study

What does it mean to be the church?

What beliefs, behaviors and activities characterize the life of a Christ-centered, Christ-directed church?

How are we living out our mission now?

Where is God calling us to go in the future?

Our congregation is preparing to enter a time of transition in the next couple of years, and we want to encourage you to engage with us in thinking about the purpose and mission of the church. To that end, we have created a four-week Bible study on key passages that describe work that Jesus entrusts to the church to carry on. These passages will be covered by the pastors on Wednesday nights April 11-May 2, but we also want to make a similar study available to life groups and individuals unable to attend. We believe it is always important for the church to revisit its vision, mission and purpose. The only place we should start in doing this is in God's Word, as we see how God would have us do and be the church in the world.

Each study provides a general and specific context for the passage, as well as questions for group discussion and individual reflection. In some cases, there are secondary passages to consider if time allows. Facilitator comments are included in green italics. We are grateful for the hard work of the individuals listed below who researched and shaped the material for each study.

1. **Session One: The Great Commission—Matthew 28:16-20** by Steve Bowser
2. **Session Two: Social Justice—Luke 4:16-30 (also Matthew 25:31-46)** by Anita Herbert
3. **Session Three: Serving and Loving One Another—John 13: 1-20, 31-35 (Mark 10:45, 1 Peter 4:10, 1 Corinthians 13, 1 John 4:7-21)** by John Lynch
4. **Session Four: Equipping Members for Ministry--Ephesians 4:1-16 (also Romans 12:1-8)** by Heather Nairn

Session One

The Great Commission—Matthew 28:16-20

Introduction

Open by introducing the topic of this study session.

The topic for the first session our Congregational Mission Study is the Great Commission - the commission that Jesus gave his disciples when he appeared to them after his death and resurrection. While this encounter between the risen Lord and his disciples is documented in all 4 new Testament gospels as well as the Book of Acts, this session specifically focuses on the narrative as found in only one of them - the Book of Matthew, Chapter 28, Verses 16 through 20, as follows according to the New Revised Standard Version:

Matthew 28:16-20

Read the following passage aloud (either by a single member of group, multiple members of the group or by you, the facilitator).

¹⁶ Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them. ¹⁷ When they saw him, they worshiped him; but some doubted. ¹⁸ And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. ¹⁹ Go therefore 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 that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age." (New Revised Standard Version)

Alternatively, if you have access to A/V resources, one the following short videos can be used to present this passage:

- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7h7Cr2gOarl>
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TI8Uw0nPeYY>

Scripture Context

As appropriate for the composition/dynamic of your group, use the following background and contextual information on the Book of Matthew, in general, and the Great Commission specifically to set the stage for further discussion.

The Gospel of Matthew is one of four gospels and the first book in chronological order presented in the New Testament. Matthew was one of the 12 apostles that were with Jesus Christ throughout His public ministry on earth. The consensus among conservative scholars is that this book was written between 50 and 70 A.D. Matthew was a Jewish tax collector who left his profession to follow the Lord. Matthew gives a personal witness account of many miracles that Jesus performed prior to His crucifixion, with only a short account of one encounter after His resurrection. The purpose of this book is to prove to readers that Jesus is the true Messiah that was prophesied in the Old Testament. It is an artistically written book and proves to be consistent with the other three gospels; Mark, Luke and John regarding

the historical events that occurred during the life of Jesus on earth. With 28 chapters, it is the longest Gospel of the four.

Matthew is divided into eight sections that describe different parts of Jesus' life. It begins with the Genealogy of Jesus that establishes and proves that He was a descendant of King David. This fact is important because it is consistent with the Old Testament description of the Messiah. The first section also describes the miracle birth story of Jesus. The second section of the Gospel records the beginning of Jesus' ministry. It also describes in detail the baptism of Jesus and His temptation by Satan in the desert. After 40 days and nights of fasting Jesus resisted all temptation. The next section beginning in the middle of chapter 4 through the middle of chapter 14 covers accounts of the ministry of Jesus while in Galilee. During this time, He commissions the 12 Apostles, preaches The Beatitudes, performs miracles and teaches many lessons on very important subjects including; adultery, divorce, giving, prayer, judging, worry, treasures in Heaven and warnings to people. Also, in chapter 13, Jesus begins teaching in parables to provide examples to His lessons. Jesus withdraws from Galilee in section four and performs the miracle of feeding five thousand people with five loaves of bread and two fish (Matthew 14:17). He also walks on water (Matthew 14:25). Chapter 17 describes the transfiguration that was witnessed by three disciples, John, Peter and James (Matthew 17:1). Section six indicates the return of Jesus to Galilee and the prediction of His death. The seventh section beginning in chapter 21 marks the triumphal entry by Jesus into Jerusalem on the back of a donkey and ends in the trial and crucifixion of Jesus on the cross as a sacrifice for all the sin in the world. The eighth and last section, describes the events of the resurrection and Jesus defeating death.

Matthew presents many important facts and significant lessons. First, Matthew clearly establishes that Jesus Christ is the Messiah that was prophesied throughout the Old Testament. Second, the book proves that Jesus was the Son of God, whom He claimed to be through living a sinless and perfect life. Third, the Gospel records Jesus performing miracles over nature (calming the storm; Matthew 8:23-27), healing people (curing the servant; Matthew 8:5-13) and raising the dead (Jairus' daughter; Matthew 9:18-19). Fourth, Jesus personally gives over 200 real and practical lessons of how God desires people to live, respond through challenging circumstances, and make choices regarding their future for eternity. A few examples of these include: having faith (Matthew 9:29), dealing with fear (Matthew 8:26), God answering prayers (Matthew 8:2), the promise of salvation (Matthew 10:22), obeying God (Matthew 15:19), loving your neighbor (Matthew 19:19), sacrificing (Matthew 20:22), resolving legal issues (Matthew 5:25), how to give to others (Matthew 6:2), forgiving others that sin against you (Matthew 6:14), resisting temptation (Matthew 4:2), being a hypocrite (Matthew 23:28), acknowledging Christ (Matthew 10:32), and the image of Heaven and Hell (Matthew 13:49, 50). Every word spoken and written in this Gospel can be applied to life in a practical manner.

In the final 5 verses of the last chapter of Matthew is found the **Great Commission**, the instruction of the resurrected Jesus Christ to his disciples from a mountain in Galilee to spread his teachings to all the nations of the world. This commission specifies the calling of all disciples of Christ which is the mission of all Christians that have a faithful commitment to Jesus. It is to spread the Good News of Jesus Christ to the world and teach the lessons that He commands. Other versions of the Great Commission are found in Mark 16:14–18, Luke 24:44–49, John 20:19–23, Acts 1:4–8. In Luke, Jesus tells the disciples to preach repentance and forgiveness, and promises that they will have divine power. In John, Jesus says the disciples will have the Holy Spirit and the authority to forgive sins and to withhold forgiveness. In Acts, Jesus promises the disciples that the Holy Spirit will inspire them. All these passages are composed as words of Christ spoken after his resurrection. The call to go into the world in

Matthew 28 is prefaced a mere four chapters earlier when Jesus states that the Gospel message will be heard by representatives of all nations, at which time the end will come.

Scripture Commentary

As appropriate for the composition/dynamic of your group, use the following Commentaries on Matthew's depiction of the Great Commission to encourage additional learning and discussion.

Commentary on The Great Commission – Richard Beaton (May 18, 2008)

The arrest and crucifixion of Jesus was a deeply disorienting experience for his followers, ruthlessly dashing in a matter of hours the great hopes and dreams they all shared. They had lost one they loved and admired to a brutal execution. To see Jesus alive after his death, which they naturally assumed had ended everything, must have been utterly astonishing. Nothing in their history or Jewish faith had prepared them for what was occurring. To say they struggled with cognitive dissonance would be an understatement.

Matthew 28.16-20 provides the narrative of the last recorded encounter of Jesus by the disciples and the final words of Jesus close the Gospel. Directed to return to Galilee where Jesus would meet up with them, the disciples followed yet again, not knowing what they would encounter. Galilee was where it all began and Galilee, it seems, would mark the new beginning. It is difficult to imagine what their journey was like, but it had to have been a memorable one. It was the ultimate road trip, filled with long conversations that focused upon making sense of the mind-bending events that had transpired, wondering aloud what would happen next. This moment with Jesus would be an important time for them. They had lost everything in the catastrophic events that preceded this, and they were on their way to discover what, if anything would be next.

We all struggle to comprehend the astonishing work of God in Christ. Having reunited with Jesus in Galilee, the disciples' response is somewhat peculiar. Upon seeing Jesus they worship. This part we understand; it makes sense given the circumstances of Jesus' resurrection and the preceding events. But they also doubt. Worship is not typically associated with doubt. In fact, many feel that even if they do doubt, they cannot admit it. The text here does not so much focus on doubt in the sense of unbelief as it does on the cognitive dissonance that arises from unusual, even unbelievable, circumstances. This is one case where their understanding of the world and the way that God had previously worked in it did not match with what they saw before them.

Jesus' parting words are commonly referred to as the Great Commission. We typically hear it during mission days at church, mission conferences, or when missionaries come to town with their slide shows, presentations and the like. But it is more than that; the reference of the text is much broader. The text frames the basis for the communal identity and life together for the movement that will become the church. Four elements emerge that draw our attention.

There are four "alls" in this text: Jesus has **all** authority given to him, we are to make disciples of **all** nations, we are to teach that we should obey **all** that he commanded during his earthly life, and the promise that closes is that he will be with us **always**. These four "alls" capture much of what the paragraph intends to communicate and also the central message of the Gospel of Matthew.

All authority: The incarnation and Jesus' life on earth were marked by his profound humanity. Apart from a glimpse of his glory during the Transfiguration, this is a Jesus we are not accustomed to. In this

scene the authority that Jesus taught with and exercised in his healings and deliverances becomes positional. He has been given all authority in heaven and on earth, and the disciples' teacher is now revealed as the Lord of all. The power of passages like Matthew 11:25-30 reside in the person of Jesus. Similarly, the commission that follows has little authority if Jesus were not the Son of God.

All nations: The purpose of God is to be reconciled with all humanity, which includes every nationality and race. Jesus' ministry was primarily limited to the Jewish people throughout Matthew's gospel, but here the boundaries are now expanded to include all humanity. Thus the commission has an international scope. Note, however, that the text does not say to take the *gospel* to the nations, although it is implied. Jesus here actually says that they are to *make disciples* of all nations. This is the primary verb of the section, and it is a command. Shallow evangelism is not Jesus' intent; rather, Jesus has in mind a task that is more robust. The disciples are students or pupils--learners. In this case, they are, like the twelve disciples in the gospel narrative, to become devoted followers of Jesus and together live out his teachings within broader society. Further, they are to baptize in the name of the trinity. This baptism becomes the initiation ritual that symbolically marks the movement from death to life.

All that he commanded: Of all the gospels, Matthew's is the most teaching oriented. Matthew structures his gospel in such a way that he includes five major sections of Jesus' teachings. The third part of the command is to teach those who become disciples to do everything that Jesus commanded. This follows Jesus' own instructions in 5.16 and 7.21-27, in which he underlines the necessity of doing what he teaches and not merely paying lip service. Our actions should reflect our beliefs. Statements of faith are important within communities, but Matthew reminds us that faith without appropriate behavior is empty.

Always with us: Matthew closes with what is perhaps one of the most comforting statements in Scripture. Jesus, as Lord of all, promises to be with us, the church, always, even until the final consummation of everything. This continuing, abiding presence of Jesus is a profound promise. The gospel opens with a similar affirmation in 1.23, in which Jesus is named Emmanuel or "God with us". This ending reminds us of the person of Jesus in his earthly life--the one who shared space with people, lived, and was present with them, and showed us what God is like.

The text moves us from the disciples' insecurity and lack of understanding to focus us on the exalted Lord, who as the leader of the movement defines reality. The commission is for all who are part of the people of God and incorporates the task of making disciples with teaching and baptizing as the movement expands around the world. The church is at its core to be living out the teachings of Jesus as a witness within their world. And perhaps most profoundly of all, Jesus promises that his presence will be with his people until the final culmination of the ages.

Commentary on The Great Commission – Matt Slick

This passage is called the Great Commission. It is the final instructive word from Jesus to His church. Jesus had just risen. The Jews had killed Him and were equally ready to do away with His disciples. The Roman Empire was a strict ruler that didn't like people causing any problems. The ruler of the land was Herod. There was a great tension between the Jewish community and the Roman power system. The Jews wanted to be free from Roman rule. The Romans wanted this small strange country called Israel to be peaceful. The dominant religion in the Roman Empire was emperor worship. Tiberius Caesar was the ruler from A.D. 14-37.

It was into this world that Jesus commissioned the disciples. Their commission was difficult....

Verse 16, "But the eleven disciples proceeded to Galilee, to the mountain which Jesus had designated."

The mountain is often used in the Bible to designate a meeting with God.

- Moses received the ten commandments on Mt. Sinai
- Jesus spoke to the woman at the well about which mountain to worship God on.
- Jesus went up on the mount for the transfiguration, probably the same one spoken of here.
- This was a meeting, not behind closed doors, but out in the open. They were not hiding.

They went where Jesus commanded them to go. If you want to maintain communion with Christ, you must go to where He has appointed you to go.

Verse 17, "And when they saw Him, they worshiped Him; but some were doubtful."

An interesting contrast: Some worshiped, some doubted, even though He had been crucified and risen from the dead.

- Jesus did not reject those who doubted. They were there. They had made the journey. He did not reject them.
- Also, Jesus accepted the worship of those who were there.

Jesus is worshiped in many scriptures: Matthew 2:2; 2:11; 14:33; 28:9; John 9:35-38; Hebrews. 1:6.

- Jesus receives worship and does not rebuke them. He said in Matthew 4:10 that you are to worship God and serve Him only. Yet, Jesus receives this worship.
- This is important because it means He is God.
 - Which is why He could say later, "I am with you to the end of the age."
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Verse 18, "And Jesus came up and spoke to them, saying, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth."

This is one of the most crucial statements that Jesus ever made. Jesus has all the authority... in heaven and on earth.

- Authority to forgive sins (Luke 5:20; 7:48).
- Authority to mediate to the Father (1 Timothy 2:5).
- Authority to send the Holy Spirit (John 14:26; 15:26).
- Authority to open the hearts and minds of His people (Luke 24:45).
- Authority to reveal the Father (Matthew 11:27; Luke 10:22).
- Authority to give eternal life to whom He chooses (John 10:27-28).
- Authority to raise us up on the last day (John 6:40).

Jesus, before His incarnation, was equal with the Father and He possessed all authority and power. He is still equal to the Father, but now He has two natures: God and Man.

- Therefore, as the God-man, as the Mediator, all power was given him;
- This is because Jesus was a man (Philemon 2:5-8) and had humbled Himself.

Verse 19, "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit"

This commission is mainly given to the disciples then present. But it applies to you as well.

- You are called by Jesus to make disciples of all people, to go out into the world and teach and live the truth of the cross of redemption.

Baptism was a common practice back then. It was for converts to the faith and was practiced by more groups than the Christians alone. However, Christian baptism is a picture of the death of one's self and rebirth in the Son (Romans 6). To be baptized is to show your commitment to the Lord and to His call.

- What did your baptism mean to you?
- Was it a social event that you did because, "It is the thing to do"?
- Was it because your parents wanted you to?
- Or... was it because you have identified with the Lord and have committed yourself to Him?

The Baptism Formula

- There are cult groups that say you are only to be baptized "In Jesus Name."
- They deny the doctrine of the Trinity and they deny the baptismal formula of "in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit." They are false teachers.

Verse 20, "...teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age."

When someone becomes a Christian, he is to follow the ways of the Lord Jesus.

- Being a Christian means that Jesus is Lord.
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Jesus is always with you. He will never leave you.

- This is a sign of His deity and it is a comfort to know that Jesus is always with us. He will never leave us or forsake us no matter what the situation.

Jesus wants you to finish what He began. He came to the disciples, taught them, and worked with them. He then died on the cross and rose from the dead. But, before He ascended into heaven, He gave them, and us, the commission to convert the world. He will not ask you to do the impossible. You need to know that your efforts to honor Christ by obeying His call to make disciples of all nations is something that you can do. Do it where you are, with those whom you meet, with the those you work with, with those you go to school with, etc. Be a witness for Jesus in your lives and when necessary, talk about Him, too. When you seek to accomplish God's will, He will bless your efforts because you're seeking to obey Him.

Highlights from Matthew Henry's Commentary

In opening this great charter, we may observe two things.

1. The commission which our Lord Jesus received himself from the Father. Being about to *authorize* his apostles, if any ask by what authority he doeth it, and who gave him that authority, here he tells us, *All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth*; a very great word, and which none but he could say. Hereby he asserts his universal dominion as Mediator, which is the great foundation of the Christian religion. He has *all power*. Observe,

(1.) *Whence* he hath this power. He did not assume it, or usurp it, but it was *given* him, he was legally entitled to it, and invested in it, by a grant from him who is the Fountain of all being, and consequently of all power.

(2.) *Where* he has this power; in *heaven and earth*, comprehending the universe. Christ is the sole universal Monarch, he is *Lord of all*, Acts 10:36. He has all *power in heaven*. He has power of dominion over the angels, they are all his humble servants, Ephesians 1:20-21. He has power of intercession with his Father, in the virtue of his satisfaction and atonement; he intercedes, not as a suppliant, but as a demandant; *Father, I will*. He has *all power on earth* too; having prevailed with God, by the sacrifice of atonement, he prevails with men, and deals with them as one having authority, by the ministry of reconciliation.

2. The commission he gives to those whom he sent forth; *Go ye therefore*. This commission is given,

(1.) To the *apostles* primarily, the chief ministers of state in Christ's kingdom, the architects that laid the foundation of the church. *Go ye*. It is not only a word of command, like that, *Son, go work*, but a word of encouragement, *Go*, and *fear not, have I not sent you?* *Go*, and make a business of this work.

(2.) It is given to their successors, the ministers of the gospel, whose business it is to transmit the gospel from age to age, to the end of the world in time, as it was theirs to transmit it from nation to nation, to the end of the world in place, and no less necessary. Now observe,

[1.] How far his commission is extended; to *all nations*. *Go*, and disciples *all nations*. Not that they must go all together into every place, but by consent disperse themselves in such manner as might best *diffuse* the light of the gospel.

[2.] What is the principal intention of this commission; to *disciple* all nations. ***Matheteusate***—*“Admit them disciples; do your utmost to make the nations Christian nations;”* not, *“Go to the nations, and denounce the judgments of God against them, as Jonah against Nineveh, and as the other Old-Testament prophets”* (though they had reason enough to expect it for their wickedness), *“but go, and disciple them.”*

[3.] Their instructions for executing this commission.

First, they must *admit disciples* by the *sacred rite of baptism*;

Secondly, this baptism must be administered *in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost*. That is, 1. *By authority from heaven*, and not *of man*; for his ministers act by authority from the three persons in the Godhead. 2. *Calling upon the name* of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. Everything is sanctified by prayer, and particularly the waters of baptism.

Thirdly, those that are thus baptized, and enrolled among the disciples of Christ, must be taught (Matthew 28:20); *Teaching them to observe all thing, whatsoever I have commanded you*. This denotes two things.

1. The duty of *disciples*, of all *baptized Christians*; they must observe all things whatsoever Christ has commanded, and, in order to that, must submit to the teaching of those whom he

sends. Our admission into the visible church is in order to something further; when Christ hath *discipled* us, he hath not *done with us*; he *enlist* soldiers that he may *train them* up for his service.

All that are baptized, are thereby obliged, (1.) To make the command of Christ their rule.

There is a *law of faith*, and we are said to be *under the law to Christ*; we are by baptism *bound*, and must *obey*. (2.) To *observe* what Christ has commanded.

Due *obedience* to the commands of Christ requires a diligent observation; we are in danger of missing, if we take not *good heed*: and in all our obedience, we must have an eye to the command, and do what we do as unto the Lord. (3.) To observe *all things*, that he has

commanded, without exception; all the *moral* duties, and all the *instituted* ordinances. Our obedience to the laws of Christ is not *sincere*, if it be not universal; we must *stand complete in his whole will*. (4.) To confine themselves to the commands of Christ, and as not to *diminish* from them, so not to *add* to them. (5.) To learn their duty according to the law of Christ, from those whom he has appointed to be teachers in his school, for *therefore* we

were entered into his school.

2. The duty of the apostles of Christ, and his ministers; and that is, to *beach* the commands of Christ, to expound them to his disciples, to press upon them the necessity of obedience, and to assist them in applying the general commands of Christ to particular cases. They must teach *them*, not their own inventions, but the institutions of Christ; to them they must religiously adhere, and in the knowledge of *them* Christians must be *trained up*.

3. Here is the assurance he gives them of his spiritual presence with them in the execution of this commission; *And lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world*. This exceeding great and precious promise is ushered in with a *behold*, to strengthen their faith, and engage their observation of it. "Take notice of this; it is what you may assure yourselves of and venture upon." Observe,

(1.) The favor promised them; *I am with you*. Not, *I will be* with you, but *I am—ego eimi*. As God sent Moses, so Christ sent his apostles, by this name, *I am*; for he is God, to whom past, present, and to come, are the same. See Revelation 1:8. He was now about to leave them; his bodily presence was now to be removed from them, and this grieved them; but he assures them of his *spiritual* presence, which was more expedient for them than his bodily presence could be; *I am with you*; that is, "My Spirit is with you, the Comforter shall *abide with you*, John 16:7.

(2.) The continuance of the favor, *always, even unto the end of the world*.

[1.] They shall have his *constant* presence; *Always, pasas tas hemeras—all days*, every day. There is no day, no hour of the day, in which our Lord Jesus is not present with his churches and with his ministers.

[2.] They shall have his perpetual presence, even to *the end of the world*. There is a world before us, that will never have an end, but this is hastening towards its period; and even till then the Christian religion shall, in one part of the world or other, be *kept up*, and the presence of Christ continued with his ministers.

Questions for Group Discussion

Ask and discuss the following questions (time permitting).

What is the source of Jesus' authority? And how does He exercise it?

What disciplines indicate that one is becoming a disciple...or is a disciple? Discuss how worship, fellowship, nurture and service are part of the process (of becoming a disciple). How do life experiences help or hinder our development as disciples?

What would you say is the essence of Jesus' teachings? Do they deal with laws or relationships, or both? How do they help people in daily life?

From where does strength for fulfilling the Great Commission come from? How is it sustained?

Discussion Questions for GBPC Missional Discernment

Ask and discuss the following questions (time permitting).

What kind of impact does this passage currently have on the mission of GBPC? Explain.

What kind of impact should this passage have on the future mission of GBPC? Explain.

How does GBPC respond to the command to go into the world? How does it connect to the community?

How does discipleship affect this church's decision-making process? How does it affect what this church's members think and do everyday in politics, stewardship, family relationships, etc.?

Summary Charge

Before closing, and if you have access to A/V equipment, consider playing a 1.5-minute video clip by Francis Chan at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DiaMsxHdn4> (play from 9:35).

Closing Prayer

Close by praying for:

- GBPC to make, mature, and multiply followers of Jesus.
- Each member of GBPC to take personal responsibility for this calling.
- Guidance and discernment for GBPC leaders to navigate the congregation through the upcoming transition process.

Supplementary Material

Depending on the dynamic of your group, use the following supplementary material for further study/discussion, as necessary.

Commentary -

<http://www.cornerstonewestford.com/2015/12/05/matthew-28-16-20-small-group-study-guide/>

https://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary_id=2097

<http://www.ibmglobal.org/2013/06/18/what-do-we-mean-the-great-commission-pt-2/>

https://www.sbl-site.org/assets/pdfs/Patte_Reading.pdf

Videos -

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sCXmNDQXWRM> (46 minutes)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iatGzVt14vY> (34.5 minutes)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=L-wh7aqINto> (32 minutes)

Sources/References:

<https://www.allaboutjesuschrist.org/gospel-of-matthew.htm>

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Great_Commission

https://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary_id=86

<https://carm.org/sermon-matt-2816-20-great-commission>

<https://www.biblegateway.com/resources/matthew-henry/Matt.28.16-Matt.28.20>

Session Two

Social Witness—Luke 4:16-30 (Matthew 25:31-46)

Introduction

This story of Jesus teaching in the synagogue as recorded in Luke 4:16-30 marks the beginning of Jesus' public ministry. It is a very dramatic beginning, demonstrating Jesus' command of the Scriptures as well as his intentional linking of a messianic Scripture with his own person. For our purposes, we will be reflecting upon what characterizes this "new age" that Jesus is inaugurating, this year of the Lord's favor, and reflect upon how the church is meant to carry on the mission of Jesus.

Luke 4:16-30

Read the following passage aloud (either by a single member of group, multiple members of the group or by you, the facilitator).

¹⁶ When he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, he went to the synagogue on the sabbath day, as was his custom. He stood up to read, ¹⁷ and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written:

¹⁸ "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,
because he has anointed me
to bring good news to the poor.

He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives
and recovery of sight to the blind,
to let the oppressed go free,

¹⁹ to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor."

²⁰ And he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant, and sat down. The eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him. ²¹ Then he began to say to them, "Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing." ²² All spoke well of him and were amazed at the gracious words that came from his mouth. They said, "Is not this Joseph's son?" ²³ He said to them, "Doubtless you will quote to me this proverb, 'Doctor, cure yourself!' And you will say, 'Do here also in your hometown the things that we have heard you did at Capernaum.'" ²⁴ And he said, "Truly I tell you, no prophet is accepted in the prophet's hometown. ²⁵ But the truth is, there were many widows in Israel in the time of Elijah, when the heaven was shut up three years and six months, and there was a severe famine over all the land; ²⁶ yet Elijah was sent to none of them except to a widow at Zarephath in Sidon. ²⁷ There were also many lepers^[a] in Israel in the time of the prophet Elisha, and none of them was cleansed except Naaman the Syrian." ²⁸ When they heard this, all in the synagogue were filled with rage. ²⁹ They got up, drove him out of the town, and led him to the brow of the hill on which their town was built, so that they might hurl him off the cliff. ³⁰ But he passed through the midst of them and went on his way.

As appropriate for the composition/dynamic of your group, use the following background and specific commentary on Luke 4:16-30 to aid in your discussion of this text.

Background—Jesus’ Identity as Messiah

Luke has already given us many clues about Jesus’ identity before this event in the synagogue. It is Luke who is responsible for the most extensive recording of the birth (and pre-birth) narratives. The gospel begins with the prediction of another great prophet, as the angel Gabriel appears to Zechariah to predict the birth of John the Baptist, who “with the spirit and power of Elijah he will go before him, to turn the hearts of parents to their children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the righteous, to make ready a people prepared for the Lord” (Luke 1:17). The “him” Gabriel is referencing is none other than Jesus of Nazareth, whose birth will be foretold by Gabriel to Mary in 1:26-38. Gabriel has told Mary that the child who will be conceived in her womb “will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give to him the throne of his ancestor David. He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end” (1:33). After John the Baptist’s miraculous birth (Elizabeth had been barren), his father Zechariah prophesies about the coming savior, raised up “in the house of his servant David, as he spoke through the mouth of his holy prophets from of old, that we would be saved from our enemies and from the hand of all who hate us” (1:69b-71).

We see this prophesy fulfilled when Joseph takes his family from “the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to the city of David called Bethlehem, because he was descended from the house and family of David” (2:4). Informed readers familiar with Old Testament messianic predictions would know that this is the Bethlehem prophesied of in Micah 5:2: “But you, O Bethlehem of Ephrathah, who are one of the little clans of Judah, from you shall come forth for me one who is to rule in Israel, whose origin is from of old, from ancient days.” Jesus is born, attended by angels proclaiming “Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace among those whom he favors!” (2:14), and by shepherds from the field who come to worship.

Luke records two visits of Mary and Joseph with their son Jesus to the temple in Jerusalem. The first is when, in keeping with the command of Exodus 13:2 (“Consecrate to me all the firstborn; whatever is the first to open the womb among the Israelites, of human beings and animals, is mine”), Mary and Joseph present the baby Jesus to the Lord along with their sacrifice of two turtledoves. There Luke tells us the young family encounter Simeon, who had revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that “he would not see death before he had seen the Lord’s Messiah.” Clearly this prophesy is fulfilled when Simeon testifies, with the baby Jesus in his arms, “Master, now you are dismissing your servant in peace, according to your word; for my eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the presence of all peoples, a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel” (2:29-32). The prophet Anna has a similar experience, speaking of the child “to all who were looking for the redemption of Jerusalem” (2:38).

The second visit is recorded in 2:41-52, when the boy Jesus was 12 years old, and in Jerusalem for the festival of the Passover. The boy Jesus is famously left behind by his parents, who after three days find him in the temple, “sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions. And all who heard him were amazed at his understanding and his answers” (2:46-37).

Chapter three details the beginning of John the Baptist’s ministry, the one who goes before Jesus to “prepare the way of the Lord,” using the words of the prophet Isaiah in Isaiah 40:3-4. We will return to the role of Isaiah as part of the prophetic literature later in this study. John also baptizes Jesus, despite his protests recorded in Matthew’s gospel, where Jesus responds that this must happen to “fulfill all righteousness,” Matthew 3:15 (righteousness being a key theme for Matthew, whose intent is to show that Jesus fulfills, not abolishes, the law). Here we have another revelation of Jesus’ identity, when the

voice from heaven proclaims, “You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased” (Luke 3:22). It is at this point that Luke gives Jesus’ genealogy, tracing his heritage back to Adam, the son of God.

A review of these fulfilled prophecies and auspicious beginning to Jesus’ life makes the temptation recorded in Luke 4:1-13 even that more startling. Yet we are assured that this, too, is orchestrated by God. Jesus is “full of the Holy Spirit,” and then is “led by the Spirit into the wilderness, where for forty days he was tempted by the devil” (4:1-2). Jesus is tempted by the devil to seek for himself provision, power and protection, which Jesus refutes by quoting passages from Deuteronomy. He is again demonstrating his knowledge and command of Scripture, as well as his knowledge of his mission and purpose on earth, which must not be derailed by Jesus taking on a different mission and identity.

The Holy Spirit plays a critical role in Jesus’ ministry. It is the Holy Spirit that descends upon Jesus at baptism, the Holy Spirit that fills and sustains him through the temptation, and as Jesus claims the words of Isaiah 61:1, 58:6, and 61:2, he is acknowledging that he is empowered by the Spirit of God. Readers should remember that Luke and Acts are written by the same author, and both books trace the role and work of the Holy Spirit, first in the ministry of Jesus, and then in the ministry of Jesus’ disciples. Beginning with the sending of the Spirit at Pentecost (Acts 2:4), the Holy Spirit empowers the entire community of faith in Acts to speak boldly and to act upon the good news of the ruling of God and the visitation of God’s prophet and Messiah, Jesus. It is by the power of the Spirit that the way of God, outlined in the teaching of Jesus and the prophetic speeches already noted in the earlier passages in Luke, will be realized. It is the power of the Holy Spirit that continues to fill and empower the church to complete the mission that Jesus began. With this understanding, we turn to look at the prophecy Jesus says he is fulfilling and consider how the church is tasked with carrying it out.

Commentary on Luke 4:16-30

The main thrust of our focus for this study is a consideration of the implications of Jesus’ quotation of the words from Isaiah, what he is saying when he says this Scripture has now been fulfilled, and how this impacts our thinking about the role of the church in the world. The remaining verses of chapter 4, v. 22-30, reveal how the people responded to Jesus’ claims about himself, how this word would be available to those beyond the nation of Israel, and how the people responded to these provocative words.

Gospel Parallel--Most biblical scholars believe that Mark is the first gospel that was written and its structure served as a basis for Luke (and Matthew, which explains the designation of Matthew, Mark and Luke as the Synoptic, which means “seen together,” gospels). Mark records this event in Mark 6:1-6a. Note that Mark focuses on the listeners’ response to Jesus’ teaching, rather than the teaching itself.

Teaching in the Synagogue—The synagogue services of Jesus’ day were fairly informal, consisting primarily of prayers, reading of Scripture, comments, and alms for the poor. This institution of Judaism apparently arose during the exile as a temple surrogate, but of course without altar or priest. Led by laity, the Pharisees being the most prominent among them, the synagogue became the institutional center of a religion of the Book, not of the altar. Jesus stands to read the word, then sits to teach, which was the custom of a Jewish rabbi. By the first century there was a fixed triennial cycle of readings from the Torah, which a reader would read in Hebrew and then interpret in Aramaic. We can conclude from the text that Jesus himself has chosen this particular passage to share.

Isaiah Background—According to the introduction to Isaiah in the NRSV Discipleship Study Bible, there are four important themes in Isaiah: a call for social justice; judgment on corrupt elites; a summons to

pursue worship of the Lord; and a proclamation of hope. We certainly see the first and fourth themes addressed in the texts that Jesus quotes:

¹⁸ *"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,
because he has anointed me
to bring good news to the poor.
He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives
and recovery of sight to the blind,
to let the oppressed go free,
¹⁹ to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor."*

This is a combination of Isaiah 61:1 and 58:6. Here are the original texts in their contexts, with the passages Jesus quotes in bold:

*The spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me,
because the LORD has anointed me;
he has sent me to bring good news to the oppressed,
to bind up the brokenhearted,
to proclaim liberty to the captives,
and release to the prisoners;
² to proclaim the year of the LORD's favor,
and the day of vengeance of our God;
to comfort all who mourn;
³ to provide for those who mourn in Zion—
to give them a garland instead of ashes,
the oil of gladness instead of mourning,
the mantle of praise instead of a faint spirit.
They will be called oaks of righteousness,
the planting of the LORD, to display his glory.
Isaiah 61:1-3*

⁶ *Is not this the fast that I choose:
to loose the bonds of injustice,
to undo the thongs of the yoke,
to let the oppressed go free,
and to break every yoke?
⁷ Is it not to share your bread with the hungry,
and bring the homeless poor into your house;
when you see the naked, to cover them,
and not to hide yourself from your own kin?
⁸ Then your light shall break forth like the dawn,
and your healing shall spring up quickly;
your vindicator^[a] shall go before you,
the glory of the LORD shall be your rear guard.
⁹ Then you shall call, and the LORD will answer;
you shall cry for help, and he will say, Here I am.
If you remove the yoke from among you,
the pointing of the finger, the speaking of evil,*

¹⁰ *if you offer your food to the hungry
and satisfy the needs of the afflicted,
then your light shall rise in the darkness
and your gloom be like the noonday.*
Isaiah 58:6-10

Comments on 4:18-21—The reading begins with a proclamation that the Spirit of God is upon the reader and has anointed him. By making these words his own, Jesus is claiming his Messianic identity, and also that the age of God’s reign is here, and that futuristic Old Testament prophecies are now being fulfilled. There are four infinitives in Jesus’ quotation: to bring good news, to proclaim, to let go free, and to proclaim. Three times Jesus (and the text) uses the pronoun “me,” which underscores the role of this passage as a description of Jesus’ ministry.

It is important to note that Jesus’ work will be good news to the poor. Luke records more of Jesus’ teachings about the poor than any other Gospel (see also 14:13, 21; 16:20, 22; 18:22; 21:3).

Jesus also references release for the oppressed. While elsewhere in the gospel this word is only used for the forgiveness of sins, here we might understand Jesus’ desire to release persons from various forms of bondage and oppression: economic (the poor), physical (the lame, the crippled), political (the condemned), and demonic. Forgiveness of sins, therefore, can also be seen as a form of release from bondage to iniquity (Acts 8:22-23).

The restoration of sight to the blind was closely associated with the prophetic vision of the fulfillment of God’s promises to Israel. When Jesus restores sight to the blind (as he does in Luke 7:21-22; 18:35), he is figuratively fulfilling God’s work of salvation as foreseen by the prophet Isaiah. Jesus is dramatically fulfilling the role of the one who would be a “light for the nations” (see 2:32; Acts 13:47). Like Jesus, his followers are to be light for others (Luke 8:16, 11:33).

The proclamation of the “year of the Lord’s favor” in Isaiah 61 is connected with the Jubilee year legislation in Leviticus 25. Following a series of seven sevens, the fiftieth year was to be a time when “you shall proclaim liberty throughout the land to all its inhabitants” (Lev. 25:10). The most likely interpretation is that Jesus related the figure of “the year of the Lord’s favor” to the kingdom of God. Jesus’ ministry signaled that the time for the liberation of the impoverished and oppressed had come, and in that respect at least his work would fulfill the ideal and the social concern of the Jubilee year.

The importance of the reading of Isaiah in this scene can scarcely be exaggerated. For Luke it proclaimed the fulfillment of Scripture and the hopes of Israel through Jesus’ ministry as the Son of God. It stated the social concern that guided Jesus’ work and allowed the reader to understand all that Jesus did as the fulfillment of his anointing by the Spirit. What Jesus understood by these verses, however, differed sharply from what those gathered in the synagogue assumed they meant.

Commentary from:

Craddock, Fred B. “Luke” in *Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching*, edited by James Mays, Patrick Miller, Paul J. Achtemeier. Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 1990.

Culpepper, R. Alan. “The Gospel of Luke” in *The New Interpreter’s Bible: A Commentary in Twelve Volumes*, vol. IX, edited by Leander E. Keck. Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1995.

“To the Jew First...” We understand that the mission of Jesus was to provide salvation for all human beings who would receive him. This was not the expectation of the first century Jew, who understand the Messiah to be the one who would restore the favor and fortune of God’s chosen people, the Jews. Keep in mind it was not God’s intention to reject his chosen people, who were included in this promise, as Paul reminds us in Romans 1:16: “For I am not ashamed of the gospel; it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who has faith, *to the Jew first* and also to the Greek” (italics mine). We see the intended expansion of the gospel also in Acts 1:8, Jesus’ final words to his disciples prior to his ascension:

“But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”

Hopefully, this pattern of gospel expansion based on concentric circles is familiar to those associated with GBPC, for this verse provided the pattern for our vision statement:

“The vision of GBPC is to share the love of Christ through one million touches in our church, our community, our country, and around the world.”

Jesus quickly disabuses his Jewish audience of any notion of privilege or preference. Indeed, his two examples from the Old Testament prophets Elijah and Elisha depict stories of their healing ministry to those outside of the community of faith: a Sidonian widow whose son was raised from the dead, and a Syrian man who was cleansed from leprosy. Jesus understood and foretold that he would be rejected by his people, and this story gives us a first glimpse of this, not only in Jesus’ words, but in the people’s corresponding response, where they in their fury drive him out of town with the intention of throwing him off the cliff on which the town was built.

Implications for the Church

Ask and discuss the following questions (time permitting).

As we saw in last week’s study of the Great Commission, Jesus leaves his disciples with work to do. They are to go and make disciples of all nations. They are to be his witnesses all throughout the world. They are also to do the work of the kingdom as described by Jesus in Luke 4:18-19, when Jesus connects these prophetic words of Isaiah with their fulfillment in the kingdom that is now at hand through his ministry.

Let us take another look at the words Jesus chooses to quote:

¹⁸ *“The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,
because he has anointed me
to bring good news to the poor.
He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives
and recovery of sight to the blind,
to let the oppressed go free,
¹⁹ to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.”*

Who are the poor among us? How is the message of Jesus good news to them?

What are the things that are holding people captive in our society today? How does the gospel message free them from those captivities? What types of ministries does our church do or could we do to aid in helping release people?

Who are the oppressed in our society? What are the structures in our society that cause oppression? What is the role of the church (our church) in helping to challenge and break down those structures?

For Additional Study—Matthew 25:31-46

Time permitting, take a quick look at Matthew 25:31-46 and discuss the questions that follow.

One of the famous “social justice” teachings of Jesus is the story of the sheep and the goats as recorded by Matthew in Matthew 25:31-45. Skim the passage below.

³¹ “When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on the throne of his glory. ³² All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats, ³³ and he will put the sheep at his right hand and the goats at the left. ³⁴ Then the king will say to those at his right hand, ‘Come, you that are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; ³⁵ for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, ³⁶ I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me.’ ³⁷ Then the righteous will answer him, ‘Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry and gave you food, or thirsty and gave you something to drink? ³⁸ And when was it that we saw you a stranger and welcomed you, or naked and gave you clothing? ³⁹ And when was it that we saw you sick or in prison and visited you?’ ⁴⁰ And the king will answer them, ‘Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, ^[g] you did it to me.’ ⁴¹ Then he will say to those at his left hand, ‘You that are accursed, depart from me into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels; ⁴² for I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, ⁴³ I was a stranger and you did not welcome me, naked and you did not give me clothing, sick and in prison and you did not visit me.’ ⁴⁴ Then they also will answer, ‘Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not take care of you?’ ⁴⁵ Then he will answer them, ‘Truly I tell you, just as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to me.’ ⁴⁶ And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.”

Jesus mentions six classifications of people:

- Those who are hungry
- Those who are thirsty
- Those who are strangers
- Those who are naked
- Those who are sick
- Those who are in prison

For each group, there is a specific action that Jesus commends as an action blessed by the Father and worthy of an inheritance:

- The hungry are fed

- The thirsty are given drink
- The stranger is welcomed
- The naked are clothed
- The sick are cared for
- The imprisoned are visited

There is no “spiritualizing” needed of these groupings of people; instead, the parable should be taken at face value as describing those with very specific physical needs that the “sheep” are commended for addressing. Amazingly, the person of Christ can be found in each of these people (“Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me” v. 40).

What ministries does GBPC have that take care of the hungry? Thirsty? Strangers? Naked? Sick? Imprisoned?

If there is an area lacking our attention, in what ways might we as a church be called to help individuals with those particular needs?

Conclusion

One of the great “tensions” in the Christian household is that there are some churches that do great at evangelism (fulfilling the Great Commission of sharing the gospel), and others that do great at social justice, which are the actions pointed to by our Luke 4 text as well as by Matthew 25. Clearly, Scripture commands us to do both. But also clearly, sometimes it is difficult for churches to have equal focus on both.

What do you think is a healthy balance for a church to have between word and action? How good are we as a church at sharing our faith with others? How good are we at serving others? What are the metrics we use to evaluate this?

How good are you at sharing your faith with others? How good are you at serving others?

It is also clear that both of these actions (evangelism and social justice) primarily require an external focus. This produces another tension within the church—meeting the needs of those who are here, versus meeting the needs of those who are not here, as we are challenged to share and serve those in the community (and beyond) through word and deed.

Do you see this tension at GBPC? Does revisiting these two texts (Luke 4 and Matthew 25) help you understand the current prioritization and focus of GBPC? What else might God be calling us to do in response to this teaching?

Closing Prayer

Spend some time praying for the following:

- Ministries/missions of GBPC that help those in need
- Any tensions you discern between those who are already a part of GBPC and those we are called to share and serve in the community and beyond
- Continued faithfulness to respond to the Spirit’s leading for those in need around us

Session Three

Serving and Loving One Another—John 13: 1-20, 31-35

Introduction

Open by introducing the topic of this study session.

This story of Jesus washing the feet of the apostles and proclaiming the ‘ONE’ true commandment in the Upper Room as recorded in John 13 marks the shift of Jesus’ public ministry to a more intimate ministry with the apostles.

Authority. Where does authority come from? That is one of the critical concerns of our day, as it is in every generation. This is the theme that comes to the fore as we begin the thirteenth chapter of the Gospel of John. Here John shifts his focus from the public ministry of Jesus to the multitudes to the intimate privacy of the Upper Room, where Jesus has gathered with his twelve apostles to teach them.

Jesus once said, "I have come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly" (**John 10:10**). That verse divides the teaching of Jesus into two main sections. The first twelve chapters of John speak of the giving of eternal life to men and women. Starting in Chapter 13 Jesus offers himself as the sole source of eternal life and expresses his concern in the development of that life.

Having a baby is one thing, but once the baby is born our concern is how that life grows and develops into adulthood. Parents know that is a process that has important aspects to it. This process of developing eternal life till it becomes abundant life starts in Chapter 13 with the discourse on serving and loving.

John 13:1-20 (NRSV)

Read the following passage aloud (either by a single member of group, multiple members of the group or by you, the facilitator).

Jesus Washes the Disciples’ Feet

1 Now before the festival of the Passover, Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart from this world and go to the Father. Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end. 2 The devil had already put it into the heart of Judas son of Simon Iscariot to betray him. And during supper 3 Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he had come from God and was going to God, 4 got up from the table, took off his outer robe, and tied a towel around himself. 5 Then he poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples’ feet and to wipe them with the towel that was tied around him. 6 He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, “Lord, are you going to wash my feet?” 7 Jesus answered, “You do not know now what I am doing, but later you will understand”. 8 Peter said to him, “You will never wash my feet.” Jesus answered, “Unless I wash you, you have no share with me.” 9 Simon Peter said to him, “Lord, not my feet only but also my hands and my head!” 10 Jesus said to him, “One who has bathed does not need to wash, except for the feet, but is entirely clean. And you are clean, though not all of you.” 11 For he knew who was to betray him; for this reason he said, “Not all of you are clean.”

12 After he had washed their feet, had put on his robe, and had returned to the table, he said to them, "Do you know what I have done to you? 13 You call me Teacher and Lord—and you are right, for that is what I am. 14 So if I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. 15 For I have set you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you. 16 Very truly, I tell you, servants are not greater than their master, nor are messengers greater than the one who sent them. 17 If you know these things, you are blessed if you do them. 18 I am not speaking of all of you; I know whom I have chosen. But it is to fulfill the scripture, 'The one who ate my bread has lifted his heel against me.' 19 I tell you this now, before it occurs, so that when it does occur, you may believe that I am he. 20 Very truly, I tell you, whoever receives one whom I send receives me; and whoever receives me receives him who sent me."

John 13:31-35 (NRSV)

The New Commandment

31 When he had gone out, Jesus said, "Now the Son of Man has been glorified, and God has been glorified in him. 32 If God has been glorified in him, God will also glorify him in himself and will glorify him at once. 33 Little children, I am with you only a little longer. You will look for me; and as I said to the Jews so now I say to you, 'Where I am going, you cannot come.' 34 I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. 35 By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."

As appropriate for the composition/dynamic of your group, use the following background and specific commentary on John 13 to aid in your discussion of this text.

Background - Being the Servant

As the Lord enters the Upper Room with his disciples it is a somber and crucial hour in his ministry. The shadow of the **cross** looms larger and darker over his pathway. The disciples are nervous and tense as they see the growing opposition of the authorities to Jesus, and the evident plot to do away with him. It's clearly evident that John has deliberately supplemented his account to what the other gospels report. In Matthew, Mark, and Luke the central feature of the Upper Room is the institution of **communion, the Lord's Supper**. But, strikingly, John does not mention this at all in his account. In its place, however, he gives us an incident which the other gospels do not report: the **washing of the disciples' feet**. John, of course, wrote his gospel long after the other gospels had already appeared, so he is deliberately not reproducing everything they say. Rather he gives additional details of our Lord's life.

John Introduces This Section With Unusually Significant Phrases – See Verses 1-5 Above.

The most important question about any event is not so much what happens, **but why it happens**. This seems to be John's concern as he focuses on the motives behind the washing of the disciples' feet by Jesus. Why did Jesus do this? John gives **six (6) powerful motives** that pressed upon Jesus and led to the foot washing.

1. The first reason is evident. **Jesus knew the time was short**; his hour of departure was at hand. The end of an era is always a critical time, a time of pressure when you know you must leave a place where you think seriously about what is happening. Jesus feels this Passover is the divinely appointed time. All through his ministry he knew he was to be the "Lamb of God who

would take away the sin of the world” (John 1:29). He also knew this would occur when the nation was gathered to offer the Passover lamb, the feast that was instituted in Egypt as the angel of God's wrath passed over the houses of the Israelites when he saw the lamb's blood upon their doorposts. In that rich and redolent symbolism, our Lord sees himself. The time has also come when he, as the grain of wheat, must fall into the ground and die. He sees, as a result of his death, a great harvest of Jews and Gentiles to follow.

2. Secondly, **he was moved by an overwhelming sense of love for his disciples**. Listen to these beautiful words, "having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end." One version has "unto the uttermost." He knew what was coming and he dreaded and feared it. But, for the sake of the disciples, he pressed on, despite his own reluctance. Within twelve hours of this event he is hanging upon a cross. Later in this discourse he says to his disciples, "Greater love has no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends" (**John 15:13 NRSV**). No one can go further in his expression of love for someone than to die for him. John sees this occurring here: He loved his disciples "unto the uttermost."

*One of the lessons we learn from the Gospel of John is that the relationship which Jesus had with his disciples is the relationship he will have also with us. He loves us "unto the uttermost", as well. Nothing we do, or fail to do, in foolish ignorance, will stop him from loving us unto the end. He may have to discipline us. That is an act of his love. He may bring remarkable experiences into our lives, but we may be sure that underneath all is his loving concern for us. How important it is for us to remember that. Jude, one of Jesus' brothers, writes, "Keep yourself in the love of God" (**Jude 1:21**). God loves you, and out of that love everything he does with you will flow. This is our assurance: Having loved his own, even though he was about to be tortured and to pass into a dark struggle that no man can comprehend, he did not think of himself but only of those whom he loved.*

3. The third motive follows. **Jesus knew that the devil was bringing about a crisis and that he had determined to use Judas to betray him**. The Greek wording here is very interesting. The English text says "the devil had already put into the heart of Judas ... to betray him," but the Greek text says only, "the devil had put into the heart" (not necessarily the heart of Judas) "that Judas would be the one to betray him." Perhaps the editors are right here in saying that it was into the heart of Judas that the devil put the thought to betray Jesus, but some commentators take this to refer to the devil's heart. They suggest that he had determined in his own heart to use Judas as his victim to betray the Lord. By this time Judas was a helpless servant of the devil, so that what the devil had determined in his own heart would be carried out. Dr. F. F. Bruce translates this, "The devil had already resolved that he would use Judas Iscariot to betray him." This indicates how easily we can be victimized by the devil. He can put thoughts into our minds and hearts and, if we follow them, failing to realize that Scripture declares them to be wrong, we will end up betraying our highest hopes. There is the third motive: The devil, the enemy, is at work, closing in on Jesus, and he knew it!
4. The fourth motive is, "**Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands...**" Our Lord knew he was the director, the one in charge of events. He was not, therefore, a victim of a "Passover plot." A number of years ago a Jewish writer wrote a book entitled *The Passover Plot*, in which he suggested that Jesus was the helpless victim of scheming among Jewish leaders and Roman authorities to put him to death. But these words make very clear that such was not the

case. Jesus was in charge of events. He knew what he had to do, and he himself would see that it was carried out.

5. The fifth motive was, "[knowing] **that he had come from God and was going to God,**" Jesus knew exactly who he was. He knew his origin: He had a deep sense of his own identity. Those who know who they are, we say, are "secure." They cannot be derailed, or turned aside from what they are determined to do. Knowing who they are, they have a deep sense of security. Throughout this account Jesus never panics. He is always in control, moving with a quiet majesty through the events of his arrest and his appearance before Herod, Pilate, and the chief priests. He is in full control because he knows who he is.

How important for Christians to understand this. It is one truth which the New Testament constantly thrusts upon us! When you are facing pressure at home, in your job, or wherever, pressure to give in to something you know you should resist, the Scripture urges you, "Remember who you are. You need no longer be the victim of the wiles of the enemy; you no longer must obey him. You belong to God. You are part of the Kingdom of love, not of anger and fear. You are loved and cherished by your Father. Your sins are forgiven."

6. The sixth motive, and the one most immediately pressing upon him, is implied in **Verse 5: "Then he poured water into a basin, and began to wash the disciples' feet, and to wipe them with the towel with which he was girded."** Jesus took off his outer garments, leaving himself with nothing but the loincloth of a slave, and began to wash the feet of the disciples. It is evident from this account that the disciples ought to have done this. Undoubtedly there had been many occasions in the past when they had done so. In those days it was customary for a servant to wash the feet of anyone entering a house from the dusty roads. Why didn't one of the disciples do this?

*Remember, In Luke's account of this evening, Jesus was about to institute the **Lord's Supper (Communion)**, and the disciples began to argue among themselves on who was the greatest. Like children who won't do their assigned work (washing the dishes, for instance) because they're angry at each other, they refuse to acknowledge whose turn it is, until one is made to do it by a wise parent. This was happening in the Upper Room as the argument over who was the greatest went on. But Jesus waited until they were all reclining around the table, no one having offered to do the foot washing. Without a word he rose, took off his garments (reducing himself to the position of a slave), and, kneeling in front of each disciple in turn, including Judas, washed his feet and dried them with a towel. **They were shocked, stunned, and embarrassed. They didn't know what to make of this.***

Peter's Reaction – See Verses 6-9 above.

How grateful we ought to be for Peter, the representative Christian! He always does what we would have done if we had been there. Here we can learn how the Lord would have treated us, had we been present.

Peter does three (3) things:

- 1 First, in typical fashion, **he displays his utter ignorance: "Lord, do you wash my feet?"** In the original this question is very emphatic. The two pronouns are placed together, as though Peter said, "Do you

my feet wash?" Clearly he is offended by the Lord's actions, because he has totally misunderstood the nature of authority.

Like us, Peter has been brought up to view authority as a hierarchical structure. Authority belongs to the man at the top, and the sign of it is that people serve him, doing for him what he wants them to do. The mark of authority is that others work for you or under you. The whole world operates on this basis. How many people do you have under you? How many people work for you? In business, home, school, sports, the military, political life, everywhere, that is the invariable view of the nature of authority. Peter was offended because the Lord ignored that. The one at the top, the one with true authority, in Peter's view, ought to be served. But here the One who clearly deserved to be served was instead serving. Peter was offended by that, perhaps because he hoped one day to have a degree of authority himself, when he himself would be served.

Jesus describes Peter's problem, and ours, when he says, "What I am doing you do not know now..." Peter did not understand what Jesus was doing because he did not understand the nature of true authority. Ignorance was his problem. Jesus does not rebuke Peter for that, rather he makes him a promise: "but afterward you will understand." The commentators differ as to when this "afterward" came. Some say it was not till Pentecost, when the Holy Spirit came, that the disciples understood. That is perhaps true. At Pentecost they began to understand many things they did not understand earlier. But I believe our Lord is here simply referring to the explanation that he is going to give at the end of his actions. At the moment, however, Peter does not understand. He thinks this is all a matter of politeness and courtesy, a matter of washing dirty, uncomfortable feet. Jesus' doing that makes him uneasy; he should not be doing that. That was the limit of his understanding. But Jesus' promise was that in a moment he would understand it meant much more.

- 2 Peter's reaction to this promise is typical of him: "**You shall never wash my feet!**" He's so sure he's right, and so totally unaware of the pride, self-righteousness, and ignorance wrapped up in his statement. Oh, the Peter in all of us! Failing to understand, he simply asserted himself: "You will never wash my feet. I'll never let you do that." Jesus responds to this statement with a warning, not a promise: "If I do not wash you, you have no part with me." (It is not as the NRSV says, "no part in me." Dr. F. F. Bruce says, "it is dangerous to interchange prepositions." Here is one place where that has occurred.) Jesus told Peter, "You will have no part with me. You will have no fellowship, no companionship, no sense of my presence with you." Jesus is not talking about beginning the Christian life, but of enjoying it, of progressing in it. He thus indicates to Peter there is more to this than meets the eye: "If I don't wash you (whatever that may mean) you will have no part with me." It is a serious matter.
- 3 That's all that Peter needs. Again, in typical fashion, he swings to the other extreme, demonstrating his love for Jesus in these words, "**Lord, not my feet only but also my hands and my head!**" "Lord, if it means I'm going to lose you I don't care about theological arguments, wash every part of me! Do whatever it takes." That is a wonderful response, coming from a thoroughly loving heart. It indicates why Jesus always deals graciously with Peter, as he does with us. He looks on the heart. Many Christians don't have their doctrines straight. They say things wrong, but their hearts are right. They love the Lord, and want very much to have a relationship with him. That, too, is Peter's desire, which he manifests in these impetuous words.

In response, Jesus gives a full explanation in **verses 10-11 below**. This is the critical part of this whole passage. Our Lord gives a **two-fold** explanation, for there are two great truths, one **theological** and one **intensely practical**, which are symbolized by his action. This is what he wanted them (and us) to learn.

First,

Jesus said to him, "He who has bathed does not need to wash, except for his feet, but he is clean all over; and you[plural] are clean, but not all of you." For he knew who was to betray him; that was why he said, "You are not all clean." (John 13:10-11 NRSV)

There is a natural logic about this. Jesus is simply indicating what was true in the culture of the day. Everybody took baths in the morning, and thus was "clean." But as they went about the dusty streets their feet became dirty. This didn't mean they needed another bath, however, they only needed to wash their feet. In this beautifully symbolic teaching, in ways they could never forget, Jesus explains what he means. To the disciples (with the exception of Judas) he says, "You are clean." What does he mean by that, and when did it happen? From this and other Scriptures we know that he is talking about what Paul calls "the washing of regeneration" (**Titus 3:5 NRSV**), of being born again, of **being renewed by the Spirit**, of **becoming a new creature in Christ**. That has only to occur once. In fact, it can only occur once. Paul speaks of this in the letter to Titus when he says, "We are saved by the **washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit**, through Jesus Christ our Lord", (**Titus 3:5 NRSV**). That is the beginning of the Christian life. All but Judas, among the disciples, had already experienced it.

That is **regeneration**, and it only occurs once. Some Christians become confused here. They think every time sin comes into their lives they must be saved all over again, as though the Holy Spirit had stuttered when he said, "Regeneration", pronouncing it "re-re-re-regeneration!" No, it's not that. **Once is enough.**

Jesus now comes to the **second** explanation in **verses 12 – 15 below** of what was implied when he washed the feet of the disciples. This application is **intensely practical**.

When he had washed their feet, and taken his garments, and resumed his place, he said to them, "Do you know what I have done to you? You call me Teacher and Lord; and you are right, for so I am. If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have given you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you. (John 13:12-15 NRSV)

Notice that Jesus introduces this by asking a question designed to make them think. "Do you know what I have done to you?" That is, "Have you thought this through? Do you know that this is more than a simple act of cleansing away the dirt from your feet? This is a symbol of something far more important and significant, not only of what I have done to you, but of what I want you to do to each other." What did he mean by the words, "I have given you an example"? An example of what? He had given an example of the true basis of authority! **Where does influence, real authority come from? It comes from loving service!**

They called him **Teacher and Lord**. They saw that he had **authority**, and followed him because of that. Why? **Because he had served them!** They voluntarily obeyed him because he had lovingly taken care of them, delivered them, comforted them, encouraged them, taught them, given himself to them, taken time to be with them, to serve them. Because of that they found themselves eager to follow him, willing to obey him, even when they could not understand him.

This great event in the Upper Room forms the basis for true church discipline and true leadership. This constitutes one of the greatest challenges the church faces today. We are called to demonstrate a different kind of authority, but what we've done is to import the world's view into the church. We have popes, bishops, superintendents, and many kinds of hierarchical structures. We give authority to the man at the top. Jesus never taught that. He taught instead that he who serves wins the hearts of others. **They will obey him, calling him Teacher and Lord, because he loves them and serves them.** Note how he emphasizes the importance of this.

Truly, truly, I say to you, a servant is not greater than his master; nor is he who is sent greater than he who sent him. If you know these things, blessed are you if you do them." (John 13:16-17 NRSV)

Background - The One, New Commandment

In **Verses 31-35** we will understand what has happened to Judas and what is happening to Peter only when we see these in relationship to that central thing that Jesus talked about, the new commandment: *(Judas is sent away, and as always there is some resistance from Peter as discussed above.)*

When he [Judas] had gone out, Jesus said, "Now is the Son of man glorified, and in him God is glorified; if God is glorified in him, God will also glorify him in himself, and glorify him at once. Little children, yet a little while I am with you. You will seek me; and as I said to the Jews so now I say to you, "Where I am going you cannot come." A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; even as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another. (John 13:31-35 NRSV)

This is a very important moment in our Lord's life. He introduces it with these rather mysterious words about glorification: "**The Son of Man is now glorified.**" He refers to the exodus of the traitor from the midst of the disciples. It is important to see that Jesus does not say this, nor does he give the new commandment, until Judas is gone. When Judas leaves Jesus says, "Now is the Son of Man glorified." That is, now (by this means) is God's purpose advanced and fulfilled. Not only the Son but the Father too is glorified. Further, Jesus says the Father will glorify himself again and he will do it immediately, which is clearly a reference to the cross. We know from the Scriptures that the whole universe exists for the glory of God, and, since Jesus himself tells us that here is a moment when God is glorified, we must see this as a very significant and profoundly important moment.

This is also indicated by the new name, "**Little children,**" by which he addresses the disciples for the first time in his ministry. That is a tender word, a family word. Most commentators agree that it was at this moment in the events of the Upper Room that our Lord began to institute the **Passover Supper (and what we call the Lord's Supper)**, which immediately followed the Passover. Throughout the cities of Judea and Galilee and all through the length and breadth of the land that night, Jewish families were gathering to eat the Passover lamb. It was traditional then, as it still is today, for the father to act as the host for the family and invite the children to ask questions that revealed the meaning of what was going on. The littlest child was the one who began by asking, "**What do these things mean?**" and the father explained.

Clearly this is what our Lord is doing here in the Upper Room. **He sees himself as the head of a family of whom the disciples are the children.** That is how he addresses them, "**Little children,**" and they break in with the questions that children ask at times like this. Also our Lord here clearly states to the

disciples that the time of his departure has now come. "Where I am going," he tells them, "you cannot follow me." Within twelve hours he will be hanging upon a cross.

Less than twenty hours from this he is cold and dead in the grave. This, then, is a time for last instructions.

Here they are: "**A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another.**" Those simple words, "**Love one another**", sound like a first-century bumper sticker. Imagine all the little donkeys of Israel with a sign on their rumps saying, "Love one another"! It looks very much like the same kind of rather futile advice that bumper stickers give to us today. While it's good advice, no one can carry it out. Yet the whole world has always agreed that this is exactly what we need to do to solve our problems. All this terrible array of evil that haunts us and sickens us today would disappear if we could teach people to "Love one another." All the ugliness, the child abuse, the broken marriages, the violent crime, the senseless destruction, the terrible drug traffic that is destroying our children, the awful pornography, the sex mills that grind continually in every big city -- all this would disappear if we learned to love one another.

I was interested to read in the volume *Caesar and Christ*, in Will Durant's great history *The Story of Civilization*, his description of the ministry of Jesus. Will Durant was not a Christian, but, as these words make clear, he understood **the power of our Lord's ministry**:

The revolution he sought was a far deeper one, without which reforms could only be superficial and transitory. If he could cleanse the human heart of selfish desire, cruelty, and lust, utopia would come of itself, and all those institutions that rise out of human greed and violence, and the consequent need for law, would disappear.

Since this would be the profoundest of all revolutions, beside which all others would be mere coups d'etat of class ousting class and exploiting in its turn, **Christ was, in this spiritual sense, the greatest revolutionary in history.**

Will Durant recognized that if Jesus could teach people to love one another it would dramatically and drastically change the history of the world.

But is this merely futile advice, first-century bumper sticker wishful thinking? No, for in the wonderful way God has of hiding truth, hidden within this sentence of Jesus is a dramatic secret, the answer to the question we all ask, "How do you do this?" We all know how difficult it is to love unlovely people. Here is how one Christian writer described his problem in this area:

Loving people is about the most difficult thing that some of us do. We can be patient with people and even just and charitable, but how are we supposed to conjure up in our hearts that warm, effervescent sentiment of goodwill which the New Testament calls "love"? Some people are so miserably unlovely. That odorous person with the nasty cough who sat next to you in the train, shoving his newspaper into your face, those crude louts in the neighborhood with the barking dog, that smooth liar who took you in so completely last week -- by what magic are you supposed to feel toward these people anything but revulsion, distrust and resentment, and justified desire to have nothing to do with them?

We can all identify with that. **How do we "Love one another"?** Jesus tells us in these simple words, "**As I have loved you.**" What the Greek, literally, says is, "As I have loved you in order that you might love one another." One is the cause and the other is the effect. As in many places in Scripture, the word "as" here can better be translated "since": "Since I have loved you in order that you might love one another." Here our Lord is saying that his love for us will stimulate and awaken within us the ability to love other people; his love will be the measure, the cause and the identifying mark of authentic love from him.

Our love, if we understand this and relate to it, will be like Jesus' love. I do not need to detail for you what that is. It takes the whole of the gospels to tell of the marvelous, wonderful love of Jesus. I see at least three characteristics that were unusual (and inimitable) about his love: First, it was without respect of persons. He did not love people who were nice to love, as we do. He chose to love the unlovely: people who were rejected, difficult to love, looked down upon, and held in contempt by society. He loved them, not because he wanted the good feeling of love, but simply because they needed love, and his love responded. **This is the characteristic of his love. It goes out to people who need love regardless of what they are like, no matter how dirty, leprous, hurtful, proud or arrogant they may be. It goes out because they need love, without respect of persons.**

Secondly, that love will be expressed in deeds, not just words. It will not be mere talk about love, singing songs about love or calling oneself loving and not showing it. Love will be expressed in deeds. Remember the Lord's words at the scene of the last judgment when the sentence is pronounced to those on the right hand of the judge: "Enter into the kingdom that has been prepared, because when I was sick you visited me, when I was hungry you fed me, and when I was naked you clothed me..." (**Matthew 25:34-35**). **Deeds, not words.**

Thirdly, it is a love without end. This is how John describes that love where he introduces the whole chapter in these words, "**Having loved his own, he loved them unto the end.**" He never gave up on them. He loved them as long as his love could do anything to reach them. And his love included even Judas. The love of Jesus reached out to all.

Henry Drummond, who was a contemporary of D. L. Moody (and an associate of his for a while), has written a tremendous message, a classic, on the "**love chapter,**" **First Corinthians 13**, called *The Greatest Thing In The World*. In it he says that if a piece of ordinary steel is attached to a magnet and left there, after a while the magnetism of the magnet passes into the steel so that it too becomes a magnet.

This is what our Lord is teaching. It is those who learn to enjoy his love, who reckon on it, rejoice in it, feel the warmth of it and remind themselves of it; those who remember the fact that they do not deserve it, that they in no way have earned his love but they have it anyway; those are the ones who become magnetized with his love and are able to pass it on to others regardless of whether they respond in kind or not. That kind of dramatic, life-changing love is authentic Christian love. For two thousand years our Lord has been demonstrating that he can do this with people. Not everybody who calls himself a Christian displays this kind of love. **Nevertheless there are hundreds of thousands. Even millions, who through the course of the centuries have found this secret and do display a dramatic change of life. Rather than hard, arrogant, proud, contemptuous people they have become softened, loving people. Rather than violent, angry, injurious people who strike back at everyone who comes in their path they have become tender, loving, gentle people, changed by the love of Christ. That is what Jesus means by "as I have loved you."**

Ask and discuss and reflect on the following questions (time permitting).

Reflections on the Upper Room Discourse

- Do you sense there are any ways that communion and service are linked?
- What does the term servant mean in today's world?
- What differences might there be between a person who's employed as a servant and one who is living as servant of Christ in a servant congregation?
- What kind of actions and attitudes would a servant congregation show in Great Bridge Presbyterian Church?
- Can "mainline" churches minister effectively to poorer, minority populations? Can they welcome such persons into their fellowship and worship? SHOULD THEY?
- What are the larger issues facing Great Bridge Presbyterian Church's population? (Medical care, substance abuse, family violence, spiritual poverty, economic disparities....?)
 - And are there some issues that the church is not addressing adequately?
 - Is there one that you dearly wish you and others would like to take on, somehow?
- How is the world to know that we are truly Disciples of Christ, members of His body?
 - Is it by the name we wear?
 - Is it by having the right doctrine, organization, worship, etc.?

It is certainly important to have all these things; but if we think that by these things alone we are truly the disciples of Jesus, that by these things alone the world will know we are Christ's disciples then we are sadly mistaken!

Servanthood

- With so many rendering so much service (Jesus, Prophets, Holy Spirit, Apostles, Angels, Other Christians); it is easy to feel pampered. Indeed, we have been "served by greatness"! Do we take it for granted?
- How can we serve?
 - Serve in Evangelism?
Someone led you to Christ; can you not lead another to him?
 - Serve in Edification?
Many have contributed to your spiritual growth, can you help others?
 - Serve in Benevolence?
Has anyone ever showed you kindness? "Be kind to one another"

Love

- How is your love for your brother in Christ?
 - Is it Christ-like, i.e., a sacrificial love?
 - Is it observable, i.e., do people see your brotherly love in our assemblies and community?

If you admit your love for your brethren needs work (and we all can improve), look to God and Jesus as the ultimate teachers of what it means to love one another and utilize opportunities to be with brethren which provides occasion to grow and display your love and which can serve to stir you to love and good works.

Summary

SERVICE:

The important thing is that we be people of service. People who serve others, not just benefiting from the efforts of others. People who are producers, not just consumers.

Serving is not just the path to greatness in the kingdom, but also to true happiness:

"For I have given you an example that you should do as I have done to you. Most assuredly, I say to you, a servant is not greater than his master; nor is he who is sent greater than he who sent him. If you know these things, blessed are you if you do them." - John 13:15-17

"I have shown you in every way, by laboring like this, that you must support the weak. And remember the words of the Lord Jesus, that He said, 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.'" - Acts 20:35

LOVE:

What is love...? It is heartfelt affection toward God and man. It is active good will toward everyone. Where we lack heartfelt affection and active good will, we need to acknowledge this deficiency (as an indication of our spiritual immaturity). We need to be willing to relearn love. When we need learn/relearn to love others with a heartfelt love look to the Father, to Jesus, to the apostles, and to other Christians. Take the initiative to practice active good will, and heartfelt affection will develop naturally. Perhaps we now more fully appreciate why Paul wrote in regards to faith, hope and love in **1 Corinthians 13: 13. "THE GREATEST OF THESE IS LOVE"**

SHALL WE NOT FOLLOW BOTH THE EXAMPLE AND TEACHING OF JESUS, AND LIVE TO SERVE AND LOVE OTHERS...?

CLOSING PRAYER:

Lord, we pray that the gift of servitude and love may be manifest in our lives in our families in our homes that we may manifest this quality that you have brought into the world by the gift of redemption. We pray in Jesus name, Amen.

Session Four

Equipping Members for Ministry--Ephesians 4:1-16 (also Romans 12:1-8)

Introduction

Open by introducing the topic of this study session.

As we explore these scriptures there are two central ideas that Paul draws us to: **Unity in the Spirit** and **Humility**. These goals are essential in order to be a fully-functioning, healthy Church Body. In order to embody the Great Commission, to present a compelling social witness – all the while serving and loving one another, it is the Body's responsibility to follow Christ's example to recognize not only the importance of the individual parts and weaving them seamlessly together, but also to recognize the need for those parts to give way to one another based on the leading of the Spirit. Over all, when the Body is being humbly directed by the Spirit – it will allow clarity of purpose and direction.

Ephesians 4:1-16

Read the following passage aloud (either by a single member of group, multiple members of the group or by you, the facilitator).

“Therefore I, the prisoner of the Lord, implore you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called, ²with all humility and gentleness, with patience, showing tolerance for one another in love, ³being diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. ⁴There is one body and one Spirit, just as also you were called in one hope of your calling; ⁵one Lord, one faith, one baptism, ⁶one God and Father of all who is over all and through all and in all.

⁷But to each one of us grace was given according to the measure of Christ's gift. ⁸Therefore it says, “WHEN HE ASCENDED ON HIGH, HE LED CAPTIVE A HOST OF CAPTIVES, AND HE GAVE GIFTS TO MEN.”

⁹(Now this expression, “He ascended,” what does it mean except that He also had descended into the lower parts of the earth? ¹⁰He who descended is Himself also He who ascended far above all the heavens, so that He might fill all things.) ¹¹And He gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers, ¹²for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ; ¹³until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ. ¹⁴As a result, we are no longer to be children, tossed here and there by waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming; ¹⁵but speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all aspects into Him who is the head, even Christ, ¹⁶from whom the whole body, being fitted and held together by what every joint supplies, according to the proper working of each individual part, causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love.” (NASB)

As appropriate for the composition/dynamic of your group, use the following background and contextual information to set the stage for further discussion.

Background

It was in 60-62 AD during Paul's first Roman imprisonment that he wrote what we call the **prison epistles**: Colossians, Philemon, Philippians and Ephesians. He was on house arrest, free to talk but not free to go. During this imprisonment Paul wrote a letter to the church at Ephesus and the surrounding areas.

One of the 'seven wonders of the world' was right there in Ephesus: the huge temple dedicated to the goddess Diana (Artemis). People from all around flocked to that great temple. The goddess, after all, is noted for having fallen down from the sky. Although her origins were probably just the remains of a meteorite, there was much ado over her supposed powers. Note how this contrasts with Christ who not only came from God but ascended back to heaven (see Ephesians 4:8-10)!

The temple and streets of Ephesus were strewn with immoral goddess prostitutes. This wicked city flourished on immorality and flooded over into the society and families. Paul clarifies that the disciples of Jesus were not set apart to this temple or Diana, but instead set apart for God. They belonged to God and were to serve Him alone. He encourages the saints (followers of Jesus) to realize that every disciple must dedicate him or herself to Christ's service.

Paul cleverly uses these concepts of holiness, service and temple to reveal the power of the Gospel in how it creates a new people born of God dedicated to His holy purposes.

Bucknell, Paul J. [A Survey & Outline of the Book of Ephesians: The Bible Teacher's Commentary.](http://wwwFOUNDATIONSforfreedom.net)

Outline of Passage

1. Unity (not uniformity) & Peace
2. The Main Things to Agree On
3. Some Gifts for Building Up the Body in Strength & Maturity
4. Be Mature in Love – Work Together: Same Team – Same Goal

Discussion Questions

What is the difference between "unity" and "uniformity"?

What does Paul list as the essentials of unity? How are we to "walk in a manner worthy of the calling"? What are the attributes of walking in unity? (humility, gentleness, patience, showing tolerance for one another in love, having the bond of peace.)

What does Paul say are the essentials we are to agree upon? (one body, one Spirit, one hope of your calling (once Saved – always saved?), one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all who = over all, through all, & in all.)

What (5) 'grace gifts' are listed in this passage? (Apostleship, Prophecy, Evangelism, Pastor, Teacher.) These gifts are to be administered with the 'essentials of unity.' What happens when they are not?

For what purpose are they to be used? (1. For equipping the saints to serve; 2. To build up the body of Christ (both to increase the numbers of believers & to encourage those who already believe); 3. To attain unity of the faith; 4. For people to have knowledge of the Son of God; 5. To mature & strengthen believers.)

Paul uses the physical body to illustrate how the different members must work together. What are some examples of how this metaphor works in relation to the Church as a whole? In relation to GBPC?

Matthew Henry Commentary on this passage: Humility vs. Pride:

Meekness makes us: unwilling to provoke others;
not easily provoked by or offended with their problems;
opposed to angry resentments and peevishness.

Long-suffering implies: a patient bearing of injuries - without seeking revenge.

Forbearing one another in love signifies: bearing their infirmities out of a principle of love;
not to cease to love them on the account of these issues.
Even the best Christians have need to *bear one with another*, to make the BEST of another, to provoke one another's graces and not their passions.

Forgiveness: We find much in ourselves which is hard to forgive;
Therefore, we must forgive others - as we must forgive ourselves.

“Now without these things unity cannot be preserved. The first step towards unity is humility; without this there will be no meekness, no patience, or forbearance; and without these no unity. Pride and passion break the peace, and make all the mischief. Humility and meekness restore the peace, and keep it. Only by pride comes contention; only by humility comes love. The more lowly-mindedness the more like-mindedness.”

“Unto every one of us Christians is given grace, some gift of grace, in some kind or degree or other, for the mutual help of one another.” Think of a recipe, each ingredient has a different measure--according to what the Goal is, the ‘what’ that you are making.

“Note: the great gift that Christ gave to the church at his ascension was that of the ministry of peace and reconciliation. The gift of the ministry is the fruit of Christ’s ascension.”

Lastly, a Warning

Revelation 2:1, 4-5 “To the angel of the church in Ephesus write: ‘But I have this against you, that you have left your first love. Remember therefore from where you have fallen, and repent and do the deeds you did at first; or else I am coming to you, and will remove your lampstand out of its place – unless you repent.’”

Discussion Questions

The apostle John wrote this book during his banishment to the Isle of Patmos about A.D. 95 – so about 35 years after Paul’s letter to the Ephesians. What do we learn about the trajectory of this church?

What challenge is placed before this body of believers?

How are they to return to a right path?

How can GBPC take heed of this warning?

Personal Reflection

Which of the above ‘grace gifts’ have I been given?

How have I seen these gifts distributed at GBPC?

What functioning part have I discovered that I am in the church body?

How am I using this gift toward unity in my church?

Do I tend toward humility or pride in using my gift?

How am I most challenged in keeping peace and unity with fellow believers?

Romans 12:1-8

Read the following passage aloud (either by a single member of group, multiple members of the group or by you, the facilitator).

“Therefore I urge you, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship. ² And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect.

³“For through the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think more highly of himself than he ought to think; but to think so as to have sound judgment, as God has allotted to each a measure of faith. ⁴ For just as we have many members in one body and all the members do not have the same function, ⁵ so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another. ⁶ Since we have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, each of us is to exercise them accordingly: if prophecy, according to the proportion of his faith; ⁷ if service, in his serving; or he who teaches, in his teaching; ⁸ or he who exhorts, in his exhortation; he who gives, with liberality; he who leads, with diligence; he who shows mercy, with cheerfulness.” (NASB)

Outline of Passage

1. We are Holy Sacrifices
2. Renew Your Minds
3. Humility through Grace

4. Many Members - Many Functions - One Body
5. Exercise Your Different Gifts – Creates Unity of Purpose

Discussion Questions

1. What Spiritual Sacrifices can we offer to God?
 1. Our bodies. (Rom. 12:1-2)
 2. People won to the Savior. (Rom. 15:16)
 3. Money. (Phil. 4:18)
 4. Praise & Good Works. (Heb. 13:15-16)
 5. Broken hearts. (Ps. 51:17)
 6. Prayers of faith. (Ps. 141:1-2)
2. How do you think GBPC – overall - is doing regarding these sacrifices? How could we improve?
3. How is the Church challenged to “renew” its mind? How do you see GBPC standing up to the world’s culture? How can GBPC continue to be a light in the world’s darkness?
4. How does GBPC show God’s grace in our community? How do we show humility to our community?
5. What gifts does Paul mention in this passage? (Prophecy (according to each person’s faith), Service, Teaching, Exhortation, Giving (generosity), Leading with Diligence, Mercy with Cheerfulness.)
6. With so many unique gifts, how can balance be maintained in the functioning of the church? How does humility play a part?
7. In what ways can we build up others in their faith? How do we encourage those who feel unable or seem unwilling to exercise their gifts?
8. As the bond of unity grows, how does this affect the Church?
9. Is ‘unity’ something you see &/feel at GBPC? In what ways? How?

AN O.T. EXAMPLE: Exodus 25:1-9

An offering was taken from everyone to make the Temple, Ark, priests’ clothing & all other articles for the worship of God. Different designers, artisans and craftsmen worked together to gather specific materials, build under explicit directions, and precisely make all that God told them. This required an immense amount of planning, organization, management and many other skills to dutifully follow God’s instructions.

<u>Following all the minute details showed:</u>	their obedience to God
Were:	their sacrifices to Him
And	their worship of Him.

COMMENTARY from: bible.org by Stephen Cole.

EVERY BELIEVER HAS BEEN GIVEN A GIFT to use for His glory.

CHRIST DISTRIBUTES THESE GIFTS ACCORDING TO HIS SOVEREIGN PURPOSE.

“The measure or specific portion given is by sovereign design from the Head of the Church. The Lord has measured out the exact proportion of each believer’s gift...”

In an outflow of humility, we ought to bow before His sovereignty and accept how He has gifted us.

SINCE CHRIST GAVE THESE GIFTS, WE MUST USE THEM AS HE DIRECTS.

Thus, we are accountable to Him to use the gifts as He sees fit. (“Not my will, but THINE be done.”)

USING YOUR GIFTS TO SERVE CHRIST IS AN UNDESERVED PRIVILEGE.

Thus, there is no place for boasting or complaining.

“The connection with the church shows that Jesus exercises His sovereign rule and displays His spiritual presence through the church. As we live in submission to Jesus’ lordship, the world gets a glimpse of that future day when He will reign supreme.”

GOALS:

Individually, we are to: “Count others more significant than yourselves.” (Philippians 2:3)

Corporately, the Church is to: “Have unity of mind.” (1 Peter 3:8)

With: “no divisions.” (1 Corinthians 1:10)

The popular-but-anonymous quote sums it up well:

“In essentials, unity; in non-essentials, liberty; in all things, charity.”

Questions for Discussion

1. What makes the body of GBPC unique in our community?
2. Why must a believer’s purpose in life be tied in to the local church? Are we as American believers too individualistic?
3. How might GBPC be different if every member viewed himself or herself as a servant with a ministry to fulfill? How could you view yourself/your group more as servants with a ministry to fulfill?
4. Do you perceive divisions in GBPC that need Christ’s peace and renewal?