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**North Road Chapel (Evangelical)
BIDEFORD**

FORTY MOMENTOUS DAYS

“*And Jesus came and spake unto them*” (Matthew 28:18)
“*Afterward He appeared unto the eleven as they sat at meat*” (Mark 16:14)
“*And He led them out as far as to Bethany*” (Luke 24:50)

The tenth manifestation of the Risen Lord is recorded by the three synoptic Gospel writers. The exact location of this appearance is difficult to determine, but seems to have been in Jerusalem. The fact that the disciples were “*sat at meat*” suggests that it was evening. This was possibly the longest interview that the Lord held with His disciples subsequent to the Resurrection, and ultimately concluded with His ascension to Glory – which event is often reckoned as the eleventh appearance. One commentator suggests that, having appeared at an evening mealtime, the Saviour tarried with the disciples through the night, giving them His final instructions. Then, as morning began to break over the eastern hills, He “*led them out as far as Bethany*”.

This was a well-trodden path for them all: over the brook Kedron, in through the Garden of Gethsemane with its hallowed memories, and up the Mount of Olives, from whence a panoramic view of the great city of Jerusalem might be had. Then to the east side of Olivet, where the little village of Bethany could be seen, basking in the early light of dawn, with all its tender associations to the Lord. From this spot of earth, He would make His miraculous transition to Heaven. Such a sequence of events satisfactorily embraces the details given in the three Gospel records – beginning in a room in Jerusalem, and concluding on the Mount of Olives some two miles away. It is evident that the Lord was with the apostles for a prolonged period of time; and once again with the specific purpose of instructing them in “*things pertaining to the Kingdom of God*” (Acts 1:3).

A careful examination of the three writers' accounts shows them to vary considerably. Attempting to harmonise them risks blurring or destroying the truth which these highly individualistic records are intended to convey. Whilst each one may differ on certain points, all are equally inspired of the Holy Spirit; so there must be a reason for their diversity. Why was it necessary for the great Apostolic Commission to be reported four times by three different witnesses? There is a Divine purpose in it all. Each Gospel has its particular 'slant' or emphasis: Matthew towards the Hebrews – a Jewish audience, Mark towards Roman and Latinised peoples, and Luke to the Grecian or Hellenistic readership. (John meanwhile, was caused to write in a more universal sense). At the time of the Lord the three main representative races were the Jews, the Romans and the Greeks. Each ethnic group had its distinguishing features: the Jews were marked by their religion, the Romans by their political organisation, and the Greeks by philosophy, literature and art. Even God Himself gave recognition to these predominant cultures, in causing the inscription above the cross of Christ to be written in Hebrew, Greek and Latin – the respective languages of these three societies (cf John 19:20).

Bearing these facts in mind, the detail differences in the accounts of the Great Commission become much easier to understand. Matthew presents the mediatorial dominion of Christ, and His superiority – truths which needed much emphasis among the Jews. This is further borne out in the Epistle to the Hebrews. Mark, with his Latinate approach, is terse and succinct in his report of this tenth appearance, and stresses the preaching of the Gospel. The same bent is to be found in the letter to the Romans, where such wonderful themes as justification by faith are dealt with. Luke also, both in his gospel and in the Acts writes with a particular design, as will be seen shortly. Any effort to consolidate these three unique records will be at the cost of much vital detail, and does despite to the Holy Ghost who inspired their variations in the first place.

Another important point needs to be clarified. What was the precise purpose of the Apostolic Commission? It is commonly believed that on this occasion, original authority was given to the disciples to preach and to baptize – but is this really so? Consider the following scripture: “*And He ordained twelve, that they should be with Him, and that He might send them forth to preach*” (Mark 3:14). Preaching was a duty committed to the twelve disciples at the very beginning; and furthermore, “*After these things came Jesus and His disciples into the land of Judea; and there He tarried with them, and baptized*” (John 3:22); “*...Jesus made and baptized more disciples than John, Though Jesus Himself baptized not, but His disciples*” (John 4:1-2). Baptism was conducted by the apostles, from the outset.

However, there was an important distinguishing feature of their early ministry, from which the later Apostolic Commission is set apart. “*These twelve Jesus sent forth, and commanded them, saying, Go not into the way of the Gentiles, and into any city of the Samaritans enter ye not: But go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel*” (Matthew 10:5-6). The original appointment of the apostles to preach and baptize, when they were first called, was restricted to the confines of Israel. Not so at their last interview with Christ. The object of that greater commission was very different. Now they were given authority to teach **all nations**. At this point a fuller revelation of things pertaining to the Kingdom of God was given to them. The Old Covenant, which was Jewish, was to give way for ever to the New Covenant. Henceforth they were to preach to **all** men, and baptize **all** who believed.

These then are the three gospel records of the Great Commission given in Holy Scripture. The breadth and scope of this Divine directive is made clear: “*And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, All power is given unto Me in heaven and in earth. Go ye therefore, and teach **all nations**, baptizing them in the name of the*

*Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. Amen” (Matthew 28:18-20). “And He said unto them, Go ye into **all the world**, and preach the gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned ” (Mark 16:15-16). “And [He] said unto them... that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name among **all nations**, beginning at Jerusalem. And ye are witnesses of these things” (Luke 24:46-48).*

All these accounts of the Commission are united by one common factor – namely, the embracing of **all nations**. This is the vital point; of such importance that the Holy Spirit saw fit to incorporate it repeatedly in the Word of God. It is to be found once more in the Acts of the Apostles, “*ye shall be witnesses unto Me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and **unto the uttermost part of the earth***” (Acts 1:8). This was the essential part of the Great Commission – not primarily the charge to preach and baptize, for that had already been given – but to take that ministry unto all nations of earth. All former restrictions were lifted, and the disciples expressly commanded to convey the gospel throughout the world, for the Church was to be extended across the globe. The middle wall of partition between Jew and Gentile was forever broken down (cf Ephesians 2:11-22), the Old Covenant was being superseded by the New, and God was taking away the first that He might establish the second (cf Hebrews 10:9).

Notice too, the **authority** behind the Commission. This is a post-resurrection appearance of Christ to His disciples. He is about to leave them, and His words are these: “*All power is given unto Me in heaven and in earth.*” The word translated ‘power’ denotes authority, jurisdiction, and the right to exercise rule. This is not simply a reference to omnipotence – for that attribute ever belonged

to the second person of the Godhead. He is speaking particularly as the Mediator, the God-Man, for it was as such that He would return to Heaven. So in leaving His people upon earth, He categorically assures them of His ability to accomplish and bring to fruition the great plan of Redemption, for He was to ascend, by right, to an office of illimitable authority. The Philippian epistle expresses it thus: *“...being found in fashion as a man, He humbled Himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. Wherefore God also hath highly exalted Him, and given Him a name which is above every name: That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; And that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father (Philippians 2:8-11).*

Acts 5:31 tells that Christ was exalted to be a **Prince** as well as a Saviour. A special grant of authority was given to Him upon completion of the work of Atonement – a delegated kingship over all creation, celestial and terrestrial (cf Ephesians 1:20-22). It is this aspect which is particularly emphasised in Matthew’s record – a wonderful truth pertaining to the Kingdom of God, namely, the identity of the King! Here is announced the sublime fact that the entire Universe is henceforth under the mediatorial dominion of Christ.

The purpose and end in view is the final conquest of sin. That dreadful revolt which began in heaven with Satan, and spilled over onto earth, will be put down finally and forever by the Incarnate Son. For this purpose was He manifested: that He might destroy the works of the Devil (cf 1 John 3:8). This is why He assumed human nature and became ‘Emmanuel’ – God with us (cf Hebrews 2:14). Being possessed of two natures, human and Divine, He was able both to **atone** and **reign**. He was a person capable of obedience, suffering and death; but also perfectly fitted to accede to the throne

of Heaven. Thus having accomplished the work of atonement, He henceforth reigns as Lord, until the whole economy of Redemption is complete. Heaven, earth and hell are all subject to Him, and He has the authority and power to bring **all things** to their appointed culmination. As Corinthians states: *“Then cometh the end, when He shall have delivered up the kingdom to God, even the Father; when He shall have put down all rule and all authority and power. For He must reign, till He hath put all enemies under His feet. The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death. For He hath put all things under His feet”* (1 Corinthians 15:24-27). This examination of the doctrine contained in the tenth appearance will be continued in future articles, God willing.

W. H. Molland
(transcribed by R. J. Steward)

THE ETERNAL SON

“So the blessed Jesus is God’s heir. But the beauty and blessedness, the grace and glory, the joy and consolation of His being the *“the heir of all things”*, lie in this: that He is such in our nature – that the same blessed Immanuel who groaned and wept, suffered and bled here below, is now at the right hand of the Father as our High Priest, Mediator, Advocate, Representative, and Intercessor; and that all power is given unto Him in heaven and earth as the God-man (cf Matthew 28:18); and that the Father hath *“set Him at His own right hand in the heavenly places, Far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come”* (Ephesians 1:20-21)... The joy of heaven above, the delight of saints here below, their only hope and help, strength and wisdom, spring from this, that the Son of God is exalted to the right hand of the Father in the very nature which He assumed [upon earth].”

J. C. Philpot, 1860

EXALTATION

The Son of God, in human nature, was raised from the dead, ascended to Heaven, and was invested with supreme dominion over all creatures. The facts of Christ's exaltation, like those of His humiliation, are related in the Scripture narrative, and referred to in various parts of the sacred volume.

The exaltation, like the humiliation, produced no real change in His Divine nature. It affected the manifestation of it, and also wrought a real change in the condition of the human nature. This nature is now perfectly happy. The Lord Jesus has received the joy that was set before Him (cf Hebrews 12:2); and saints, who are to be happy with Him for ever, are said to 'enter into the joy of their Lord' (cf Matthew 25:21). On this nature rests, also, the full glory of the Godhead, "*the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ*" (2 Corinthians 4:6). As through Him the brightest manifestations of the Divine glory are made to intelligent creatures, so through Him they receive the commands of supreme authority. He is 'Head of principalities and powers', "*He raised Him from the dead, and set Him at His own right hand in the heavenly places, far above all principalities and powers, and might and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come*" (Ephesians 1:20-21).

This glory to which Christ has been exalted, is not a subject of idle speculation, in which we have no interest. In His address to His Father, He said, in allusion to His disciples, "*The glory which Thou hast given Me, I have given them*" (John 17:22). Hence, while we suffer with Christ, and for Christ, in this world, we may rejoice in the hope of being glorified with Him.

J. L. Dagg (1794 – 1884)

Consequences of Sovereignty

*“All power is given unto Me in heaven and in earth.
Go ye therefore, and teach all nations...”* (Matthew 28:18-19)

In the Lord’s tenth appearance to His disciples, there are included some of the last words that He would speak to them whilst upon earth. This fact in itself should arrest the reader’s attention, and invite closer inspection. Here is information and instruction of ultimate significance, earning Matthew’s record of them the title by which this passage is commonly known: ‘**The Great Commission**’. These are well-loved verses for many Christians, and have been the subject of much profitable consideration, the theme of innumerable sermons, and the inspiration for countless acts of evangelistic enterprise. Yet, as with all Scripture, it is important to pay heed to the context in which the words occur, and to the verses which precede them. Beginning to read at verse 19, the word “*therefore*” is soon encountered, which demands an examination of that which has gone before. The familiar injunction with which Matthew 28 ends, is in fact the conclusion, or consequence, of Christ’s prior statement: “*All power is given unto Me in heaven and in earth*”.

The total and absolute omnipotence of Almighty God is beyond the human mind to rightly understand – but this incomprehensible attribute can be seen, displayed in the Son of God, the Lord Jesus. Thus He is rightly called, “*Christ, the power of God*” (1 Corinthians 1:24). His power has been in evidence since the creation: “*All things were made by Him; and without Him was not any thing made that was made*” (John 1:3); and whilst at the Incarnation His Divine perfections were ‘veiled in flesh’, it was nevertheless clear that “*The Son of Man [had] power on earth*” (cf Matthew 9:6, Luke 4:36, 9:43).

What then is the meaning of His parting words to the apostles? The power vested in Jesus Christ was to henceforth be magnified, made ever more apparent, and demonstrated not simply by physical signs and wonders but in the ongoing spiritual miracle of salvation. He was “*declared to be the Son of God with power... by the resurrection from the dead*” (Romans 1:4) and, “*Hereafter shall the Son of Man sit on the right hand of the power of God*” (Luke 22:69). The Hebrew epistle gives perhaps the best summary of these events, describing Christ’s continual omnipotence, made yet greater and more glorious at His ascension: “*God... hath in these last days spoken unto us by His Son, whom He hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also He made the worlds; Who being the brightness of His glory, and the express image of His person, and upholding all things by the word of His power, when He had by Himself purged our sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high*” (Hebrews 1:2-3).

The sovereign power which resides in Jesus Christ extends to **all things**, (as the foregoing verse teaches), and throughout **heaven and earth**, as stated in Matthew 28. It encompasses **all people**, for He has “*power over all flesh, that He should give eternal life to as many as [God has] given Him*” (John 17:2). With Him is the power for justification or judgement, for salvation or condemnation. He alone has the ability to take a fallen child of earth and make them a citizen of heaven. He has sole authority over **all His people** – the Church: its augmentation, preservation and final glorification. The Ephesian epistle describes this aspect, speaking of Christ whom God raised “*from the dead, and set Him at His own right hand in the heavenly places, Far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come: And hath put all things under His feet, and gave Him to be the head over all things to the church*” (Ephesians 1:20-22). This then, is the truth conveyed by the Lord’s words, “*All power is given unto Me in heaven and in*

earth". He is Almighty and omnipotent and has absolute power, especially pertaining to the salvation of men and women, in which process He is sovereign.

What are the implications of such a doctrine? Some might imagine that this principle at once eliminates any activity or responsibility on man's part; or think that evangelistic efforts are negated; and that the preaching of the Gospel is thereby rendered void. Such are erroneous conclusions – the product of a wholly unbiblical logic. The Lord Himself refutes such thinking, and instead makes the doctrine of His sovereignty the **motivating cause** of all Christian endeavour! "*All power is given unto Me in heaven and in earth. Go ye therefore and teach all nations...*" Quite apart from breeding in His saints an apathetic or fatalistic attitude, the truth of Christ's absolute and sovereign power should be their inspiration! There is no contradiction here. A true appreciation of their Lord's power and dominion should stimulate every believer to obedience and service.

Compelling

These closing words of the Saviour found in Matthew 28 are a direct and unequivocal instruction – "*Go ye*". The preceding declaration of power serves to intensify their force and import still further. No room is left for doubt or question – 'Why should these words be obeyed?' 'On whose authority do they come?' Any such misgivings are forever silenced by the awe-inspiring prefix. These words proceed from no less a personage than the "*blessed and only Potentate, the King of kings and Lord of lords*" (1 Timothy 6:15), and "*Where the word of a king is, there is power: and who may say unto him, What doest thou?*" (Ecclesiastes 8:4). This injunction is not to be queried or denied, but instantly observed, since it descends from the throne of Him who has 'all power'. These words come complete with a seal, as it were: a description of their origin and the credentials of their Author. All who hear this charge are compelled

to obey because of the pre-eminence and honour of the One who thus speaks.

“The Lord is King! Who then shall dare
Resist His will; Distrust His care?
Or murmur at His wise decrees?
Or doubt His royal promises?”

Comprehensive

The Divinely-given commission is comprehensive in its scope: “*Go ye therefore and teach **all nations***”. In this description all types and categories of persons are embraced, both ‘Jew and Greek, male and female, bond and free’. None are exempted or excluded. There is no section of society, or ethnic group, or demographic classification that is outside the remit of Jesus Christ. For He has all power in all the earth, and therefore all humanity falls within His jurisdiction, and is subject to His standard – they must hear and believe the Gospel. No valid alternatives are admitted, “*Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved*” (Acts 4:12); none will have legal immunity in the Judgment of the Last Day, “*at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth*” (Philippians 2:10).

By the same argument, there is no place or region on earth that may deny Him access, nor any worldly power which could challenge His. For He “*is gone into heaven, and is on the right hand of God; angels and authorities and powers being made subject unto Him*” (1 Peter 3:22). The most desperate sinner, or most oppressive regime, or most antagonistic of false religions cannot thwart the inexorable might of the Lord Jesus Christ. Let His disciples go therefore, throughout all their Master’s realm, and brook no obstacle to the fulfilment of His directive. All power is His on earth, and “*The kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord, and of His Christ*” (Revelation 11:15).

Commanded

The nature of the message which the Lord's followers are commissioned to bear is described thus: "*Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you*" (Matthew 28:20). The operative word is '**commanded**'. How can the ministry of the Lord Jesus, as recounted in the gospels, be rightly described? What is the nature of His teaching? Is it a philosophy for better living? Is it the expression of an opinion which others may wish to share? Is it a collection of primary and secondary issues on a relative scale of importance? No – the reality is much greater. **All things** whatsoever Christ said and taught constitute a **commandment**. There is not one syllable of all the Saviour's ministry that can be neglected, discarded or relegated to a position of lesser significance. Sooner might heaven and earth pass away, than one of His words lose its place (cf. Mark 13:31). The doctrine spoken by Christ, in every detail, is not merely a 'suggestion' to be considered, or a 'notion' to be discussed; but a commandment to be **obeyed**. These commands take on even greater weight and severity, when the sovereign power of Christ, their originator, is taken into account.

It should also be noted that His commands are of universal application. Though spoken initially to twelve disciples in Judea, they were not intended to be the sole recipients. They were to go and teach to others the things originally commanded them – to each future generation, in ongoing succession. The Saviour ever had in mind, not them alone, "*but... them also which shall believe on Me through their word*" (John 17:20). His teaching is a perpetually 'new commandment', pertinent and relevant in every age. Furthermore, His commands are equally binding upon the unbelieving majority of mankind. Their ignorance, rejection and denial of His Word does not alter its truth by one iota, nor in any way lessen its Holy demands upon them. Surely then, every Christian, mindful of the power and greatness of their Lord, will be in earnest to proclaim to all men everywhere His Divine dictates,

saying ‘Hear ye the word of the Lord’! The man Christ Jesus, who first preached this truth in Galilee, is now exalted to the right hand of God on high! Then “*See that ye refuse not Him that speaketh*”, for there can be no escaping the dire consequences “*if we turn away from Him that speaketh from heaven*” (cf Hebrews 12:25).

Complete

What particular aspects of Christ’s teachings then, are to be adopted by His people, and concentrated upon? Which elements of it should be preached to Christians, or explained to new converts, or broadcast to unbelievers? There is no decision or choice to be made in the matter. The Lord of all power says, ‘teach **all things**’. It is inconceivable that any part of His Word should be unnecessary, or of limited usefulness, and thus omitted from the Church’s repertoire of doctrine. Yet such is, alas, all too often the case in modern Christendom. Large tracts of Scripture are conspicuous by their absence from the pulpits. Vital points of Church order and practice are avoided for fear of controversy. Multitudes of professed believers go woefully uninstructed and, “*have need that one teach [them] again which be the first principles of the oracles of God*” (Hebrews 5:12). Unbelieving men and women are not challenged with their godlessness or convicted of sin, because so-called evangelism is reduced to half-truth, and the trite platitudes of ‘easy-believism’. Is this sad state of affairs an adequate fulfilment of the Great Commission? Is the sovereign Lord who gave that command in any way honoured by such deficiency and departure? No indeed! He demands and requires that ‘all nations’ be taught ‘all things’. Would that the Church’s popular emphasis on worldwide mission was matched with an equally great desire for full-orbed and comprehensive preaching!

One individual who faithfully observed his Master’s instruction was the apostle Paul. Leaving Asia Minor for the last time, he could testify to his hearers: “*Ye know... after what manner I have been*

with you at all seasons, Serving the Lord with all humility of mind... And how I kept back nothing that was profitable unto you, but have shewed you, and have taught you publickly” (Acts 20:18-20). To which might be added “*All Scripture...is profitable*” (2 Timothy 3:16). The Apostle considered it his solemn duty to declare everything that the Lord commanded, and thought it a matter of utmost necessity (cf 1 Corinthians 9:16). Nothing was dishonestly ‘kept back’ – all was set forward; nothing was left hidden or concealed – all was ‘shown’; nothing was considered unsuitable for general ministry, or excluded from the pulpit, or reserved for private exposition only – all was ‘**taught publicly**’. This is demonstrated by the breadth and content of the epistles which he was inspired to write. In summary, he could say, “*I have not shunned to declare unto you **all** the counsel of God*” (Acts 20:27). This is the pattern for obedience to the Great Commission which every believer should emulate, mindful of the Lord to whom they must ultimately give an account.

Whilst expressing the completeness of teaching which His disciples must deliver, the Lord also dictates an important restriction. They are to teach **only** that which **He** has prescribed, “*Teaching...all things whatsoever **I** have commanded you*” (Matthew 28:20). From the time when these words were spoken to the present, error has assailed and invaded the Church. Traditions have developed, invention has crept in, elements of false religion have been embraced, and worldly philosophies adopted. In some instances, falsehood has become so firmly entrenched and widely accepted, that it is dogmatised upon as though it were truth, and preached as the genuine Word of God! Thus careless churchmen are to be found, “*teaching for doctrines the commandments of men*” (Matthew 15:9). This is a violation of the Great Commission. These are man-made fallacies and aberrations which Christ never commanded. His institutes alone are to be proclaimed, and “*if any man teach otherwise, and consent not to wholesome words, even the*

words of our Lord Jesus Christ, and to the doctrine which is according to godliness; He is proud, knowing nothing... and destitute of the truth... from such withdraw thyself” (1 Timothy 6:3-5).

Continual

The question might be asked, ‘what is the duration of the Great Commission, and for how long is this Divine injunction in force?’ By way of an answer, the Lord makes a statement concerning His eternity and immutability. *“and lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world ”* (Matthew 28:20). An important feature of Christ’s accession to the right hand of power, is its permanence. *“The Son abideth ever”* (John 8:35), *“this man, because He continueth ever, hath an unchangeable priesthood. Wherefore He is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by Him, seeing He ever liveth to make intercession for them. For such an high priest became us, who is... made higher than the heavens”* (Hebrews 7:24-26). This is the basis of His promised ongoing presence. He will remain, changelessly exalted, throughout time’s brief history, and then for evermore! There is no end of His governmental authority and power (cf Isaiah 9:7).

It stands to reason that if Christ is perpetually with His people, then His Word, and His Divine charge also remain with them, to the world’s end. As long as His people are alive upon this terrestrial sphere, they are subject to His instruction and commission. It is the unvarying edict of an immutable Lord. Then, *“continue thou in the things which thou hast learned and hast been assured of, knowing of whom thou hast learned them”* (2 Timothy 3:14). His Word is forever settled in heaven (cf Psalm 119:89). It does not lose its power or diminish in its efficacy. There is never a time at which it may be laid aside or disregarded, or its dissemination halted. Let it ever be remembered that the Word He has spoken is as powerful and as glorious as Himself. Indeed the Psalmist says of God, *“Thou hast magnified Thy Word above all Thy name”* (Psalm 138:2).

Conclusive

The closing words of Christ to His disciples as recorded in Matthew's Gospel are a solemn and practical charge, describing the commission and duty laid upon His people in every age. These verses, stressing the activity and responsibility of men, are however preceded by a sweeping declaration of the Lord's absolute sovereignty and power over all things. There is no disharmony here. The fact of His universal dominion and authority makes His word compelling and comprehensive, lends to every command a grandeur and import that cannot be denied, and should inspire every saint to full and ongoing obedience.

The greatest consequence of His sovereignty though, is this: the outcome of this Commission is certain and sure. The final result is assured – its ultimate triumph is guaranteed. “*All power in heaven and in earth*” resides in the Lord Jesus, therefore His purposes must prevail, and all His counsel will be unerringly accomplished. Nothing can alter His divine will. The conclusion of the whole matter is safe and secure in His omnipotent hands. With what comfort and confidence then the saints may go about their Master's business! Already they ‘have the victory through Jesus Christ’ (cf 1 Corinthians 15:57); and this success depends not upon them, but is on account of the Captain of Salvation and His conquests. He vouchsafes to be with His people “*even unto the end of the world*” – and He knows what that appointed end will be: “*Then cometh the end, when He shall have delivered up the kingdom to God, even the Father; when He shall have put down all rule and all authority and power. For He must reign, till He hath put all enemies under His feet*” (1 Corinthians 15:24). Then, with His word so evidently fulfilled, and the Great Commission conclusively accomplished, the universal acclamation will be heard, “*Blessing, and honour, and glory, and power, be unto Him that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb for ever and ever. Amen*” (Revelation 5:13).

R. J. Steward

The Apostles' Commission

Matthew 28:18-20

The Apostles spoke and wrote in a most authoritative manner. They issued commands, promises and threats, in the name of God. We therefore naturally inquire, by what authority they acted. The passage before us gives a most satisfactory account. In unfolding these words of our Lord...consider the commission which He gave to His Apostles.

The commission was very plain and express. Jesus, as God, possessed all power equally with the Father; but as Mediator, He received His power from the Father. He received it, partly, that by means of it He might execute His mediatorial office (cf John 17:2); and partly as a reward for executing it (cf Philippians 2:8-11). This power extended over heaven and earth. Less than this would not have sufficed for the ends for which it was given; but by this He is enabled to overrule everything for the accomplishment of His own purpose. Nor is it at all diminished by the lapse of ages. It shall indeed cease to be exercised at the Last Day (cf 1 Corinthians 15:28); there will not then be any occasion for the exercise of it. But 'til all the members of the Church be glorified, Jesus Christ will exert this power for their good; and His authority will be the hope and consolation of them all. It was upon this that He founded the commission He gave to His Apostles. He had formerly sent them to instruct the Jews; He now extends their commission to the Gentiles.

They were to **teach** all nations. As they were to baptize men in the name of the Sacred Three, no doubt they were first to make known the persons and offices of the Holy Trinity. They were to declare 'the Father', as our offended, but reconciled God and Father; they were to make known 'the Son' as the sinner's advocate and

propitiation; they were to set forth ‘the Holy Ghost’ as the enlightener, comforter and sanctifier of God’s elect.

They were to **baptize** their converts in the name of the Sacred Three... They were also to **instruct** their hearers in practical religion. It is evident they were not to be merely moral preachers. They must of necessity insist much on the offices of the Father, Son and Holy Ghost; but they were also to inculcate every moral duty, and to enforce every obligation, whether toward God or man.

The commission being so arduous, He added a promise for their encouragement. The Apostles might well have been discouraged from attempting to execute so difficult a service. They were, in themselves, poor, mean and illiterate; they had to propagate principles new, strange, detested; they had to oppose the lusts and prejudices of mankind; they had to bring men from sin to a life of holiness and self-denial; and this, not only without human aid, but in opposition to all the power and policy of the world. They could not therefore but feel themselves unfit for such a task; but our Lord gave them a most encouraging promise. When Moses declined the service to which he was called, God promised to be with him (cf Exodus 4:15); thus Christ engaged to succour His disciples in their work. He assured them of His presence to direct, assist and uphold them, and to give effect to their labours. To this promise He called their particular attention, “*lo!* ” nor will He fail to accomplish it to the end of the world. Nor was the affirmation added without particular energy. “*Amen*” may be considered as an affirmation or petition; in either view it should not be overlooked. The promise it confirms, was the solace of all the Apostles, and has been the support of all succeeding pastors. Let every one then add ‘Amen’, as importing both his wish and affiance.

Charles Simeon (1759 – 1836)

Editorial

Any regular activity or frequently observed routine, tends to emphasise the swiftness of time's passage. Recurrent events beat out the rapid tempo of existence and provide a constant reminder of the speed at which life is running its course. Not least among these is the publication of such periodicals as *The Link* – which marks the commencement of 2009 with this present edition.

What should the Christian's attitude be to the turning of the year? Ought it to be marked, or recognised in any way? The pagan festivals which constitute the so-called Church calendar are to be rejected outright; the hedonistic frivolity and excess which commonly attends the New Year is to be similarly eschewed. The lives of God's people are directed by the sovereign purposes of their Heavenly Father, not by season or solstice, nor by the movement of sun, moon or planet, which are merely measures of them. However, what the Scripture does say upon the matter is this: "*So teach us to number our days, that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom*" (Psalm 90:12). It is proper that creatures of time should enumerate their short tenure on earth, with the object of learning thereby. So as the number formally applied to the year makes a further upward transition, what spiritual wisdom may thus be received?

It is a testimony to the Power of God

From the beginning, God appointed the celestial bodies to demarcate day and night and passing years (cf Genesis 1:14-19). These vast spheres, whose dimensions and orbits overwhelm the imagination, were brought instantly into being, from nothing, at His creating word, and by that same power are sustained to the present moment. Their ceaseless rotation and unvarying path through the Universe are at His Divine appointment and control. He it is who "*hangeth the earth upon nothing*" (Job 26:7), "*It is He that sitteth*

upon the circle of the earth... that stretcheth out the heavens as a curtain, and spreadeth them out as a tent to dwell in” (Isaiah 40:22). There would be no changing year, but for His almighty power.

It is a testimony to the Faithfulness of God

Why does the created realm proceed with such order and precision? Is it simply the laws of physics and nature, or forces of gravitation and rotation? No – presiding over all these secondary regulations is the immutable Word of God. He has “*appointed the ordinances of heaven and earth*” (Jeremiah 33:25), He it is who made a covenantal declaration that “*while the earth remaineth*” these things “*shall not cease*” (Genesis 8:22), and all subsequent history is the proof and product of that promise. His Word is greater, more sure and certain than all the material creation, over which it presides (cf Matthew 5:18, 24:35). Thus the firmament, the orbs therein, the circuits and years which they describe, all declare the glorious handiwork of God, and set forth even His invisible attributes of perpetual faithfulness, “*eternal power and Godhead*” (cf Psalm 19:1-6, Romans 1:20).

It is a warning and command to the Unbeliever

Why should God have extended the world’s history to this length, and continue to augment it, when its wickedness and decrepitude is grown so great; when the whole earth is “*filled with violence*”, and the cry of it has reached to heaven? (cf Genesis 6:11, 18:21). The ungodly man is inclined to interpret the continuance of life as impunity on his part, or impotence on God’s; and scoffs, “*Where is the promise of His coming?... for all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation*”. This is a gross and wilful misunderstanding of the situation. “*The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance. But the day of the Lord will*

come...” (2 Peter 3:3-10). There can be no avoiding the fact that already “*He hath appointed a day, in the which He will judge the world*” (Acts 17:31). That this date is yet in the future, is a remarkable display of patience and mercy on the part of a Holy and sin-hating God. In the interim, He “*commandeth all men every where to repent*” (Acts 17:30); and each returning day, every new year is but a more emphatic reiteration of that solemn injunction. How can an unsaved person possibly ‘celebrate’ anniversaries, or annual events, or any occasion which marks the expiration of time? They are unwittingly giving acknowledgement to past opportunity squandered, future opportunity diminished, and inevitable judgment drawing inexorably nearer.

It is an encouragement and exhortation to the Believer

The only category of persons who have reason to rejoice in the fleeting passage of this life are those saints who diligently walk in ‘the path of the Just’. A disobedient Christian has reason to bemoan his want of sanctification and lack of preparedness to meet with God; but to those who inwardly and practically “*long for His appearing*” the word is “*look up, and lift up your heads; for your redemption draweth nigh*” (Luke 21:28), “*for now is our salvation nearer than when we believed*” (Romans 13:11). So as the year 2009 A.D. dawns, may God grant every reader this testimony in regard to Himself: that “...fast as my moments roll on, they bring me but nearer to Thee” – both in terms of time reduced, and spiritual progress advanced.

Preliminary Announcement

ANNUAL BIBLE CONVENTION

Saturday 6th & Lord’s Day 7th June 2009 D.V.

Preacher: Dr. David Allen
(Stowmarket)