

The Church's Commission of Service

*“Lo, I am with you
always, even to the
end of the age.”*

—*Matthew 28:20,*
*New American
Standard Bible*

OUR PRESENT STUDY

relates to the commission, or authorization of service, which Jesus appointed to his church in his appearances during the forty days following his

resurrection. First we have the risen Master's words on the evening after his journey with two of his disciples to the village of Emmaus, near Jerusalem. Then we have the general commission which Jesus gave just before he parted from his disciples and was received up into heaven.

The same day of the Emmaus experience, in the evening, the resurrected Jesus appeared to his disciples at Jerusalem. The lessons he imparted at that time were to soon be very valuable and important to all of his followers. He said, “These are the words which I spake unto you, while I was yet with you [while I was yet the man Christ Jesus,

before my resurrection change], that all things must be fulfilled, which were written in the law of Moses, and in the prophets, and in the psalms, concerning me. Then opened he their understanding, that they might understand the scriptures, And said unto them, Thus it is written, and thus it behoved Christ to suffer, and to rise from the dead the third day: And that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem.”—Luke 24:44-47

In the foregoing verses Luke sums up in a few words the scriptural exposition which probably occupied a good portion of the evening. We are not told what these additional words were in which “opened he their understanding,” but we can surmise. He may have explained to them the significance of the Passover lamb that was killed at that time of the year, and showed that he was the fulfillment of that annual offering as the true “Lamb of God.”—John 1:29

Jesus might have explained to them the true import of the Passover—that in the initial keeping of it the firstborn of Israel were “passed over” from death. He may have then told his disciples that the firstborn were subsequently represented by the tribe of Levi, including the priests. Jesus also would probably have shown them that Israel’s firstborn represented the “church of the firstborn, which are written in heaven,” and that all of his faithful followers will be of the “royal priesthood,” sharing with him in the work of the world’s uplift during the Messianic kingdom.—Heb. 12:23; I Pet. 2:9; Rev. 20:6

The Master doubtless also gave the disciples some suggestions respecting the greater atonement day

and “the better sacrifices” associated therewith, which he himself began. These better sacrifices would be continued in his disciples; and when finished, the atonement blessings would go forth from the High Priest to “all the families of the earth” during Messiah’s kingdom reign.—Heb. 9:23; Gen. 12:3; Acts 3:25, *Revised Version*

POWER FROM ON HIGH PROMISED

Whatever features of the Heavenly Father’s great plan of salvation the Master unfolded on that evening, we have no doubt that his disciples were deeply interested. Their sadness disappeared. Their first thoughts had been merely that they had lost their blessed Master, his counsel and instruction. Now, however, through this enlightenment, their hearts burned with a fresh inspiration of knowledge. Though they were not yet begotten with God’s Holy Spirit to a full understanding of these things, nevertheless, they saw heights, depths, lengths, and breadths that they had never before known concerning God’s plan. They began to realize that the death of Jesus was necessary for the carrying out of all the hopes and prospects inspired by the promises of God, and that they would be privileged also, not only to “suffer with him,” but also to be glorified.—Rom. 8:17

The concluding part of the Master’s message on this occasion was, “Behold, I send the promise of my Father upon you.” (Luke 24:49) The Father had promised in various Old Testament pictures that the church, the bride of Christ, would receive the Holy Spirit from Jesus, their Head. It was illustrated, for instance, in the holy oil which, poured upon the

head of Aaron, picturing Jesus, flowed down upon the body of Aaron, pointing forward to the anointing of the church.—Lev. 8:12; Ps. 133:2; I John 2:27

This promise of the divine acceptance of the church was all-important. Without it the disciples would have no commission, and could not be ambassadors for God. As we read, “The Holy Spirit was not yet given; because that Jesus was not yet glorified.” (John 7:39) They must wait for this begetting and anointing of the Holy Spirit. It alone could imbue or qualify them for the divine service—to be God’s ambassadors and representatives.

“LO, I AM WITH YOU ALWAYS”

Matthew’s account of our Lord’s benediction upon his disciples, and his commissioning of them to declare his message, is full of interest to us. By his appointment the eleven met him in a mountain in Galilee. When he appeared to them, they worshipped him, some fully assured, others wavering. (Matt. 28:16,17) It was for the convincing of those who doubted that Jesus remained and appeared numerous times during the forty days prior to his ascension to heaven. We are sure that he fully accomplished his work of convincing the eleven, for they were all of one heart and one mind when they waited in the upper room at Jerusalem for the Pentecostal blessing.—Acts 1:4,12-14

At the mount in Galilee, Jesus came near to them, and declared that full authority had been given unto him in respect to both heavenly things and earthly things. (Matt. 28:18) Unless they could realize this, it would be impossible for them properly to represent him before the world. He did not have this power

and authority previously, during his earthly ministry. He was then in process of trial as respects his faithful loyalty unto death, even unto the death of the cross. After he had fully demonstrated his loyalty, the Father raised him from the dead to a glorious fullness of power.—Eph. 1:20-21

Now, in his post-resurrection appearance to his disciples at the mount in Galilee, the glorified Messiah wished them to know that he was no longer under human limitations nor would he die again. (Rom. 6:9) That work he had finished. He had entered into the blessings of his high reward. He had experienced his change and now had all power, not only with respect to earthly things, but also concerning heavenly things.

Prophecy had declared that unto him all would bow, both those in heaven and those on earth. (Ps. 2:6-8; 110:1,2; Isa. 9:6,7; Dan. 7:14) Christ Jesus had entered into the condition where these prophecies could soon begin to be fulfilled. In heaven, all the angels worshipped and gave heed to him as the Father's exalted one. Not yet, however, is the latter part of the promise fulfilled—that all on earth should bow to him. The time for such a recognition will be during his Messianic kingdom of a thousand years. As now all who come to a true knowledge of Jesus as the Son of God gladly bow their knee to him as the Father's representative, so gladly the world will, in due time, come to recognize the "only begotten" and render obedience to him.—John 1:14; 3:16

Of that time the Apostle Paul explains 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.” All who learn to do such from a willing and pure heart in the coming kingdom will be counted worthy to receive all the blessings which God designs for his human creation.—Phil. 2:10,11; Rom. 14:11

“GO YE THEREFORE, AND TEACH”

Herein is Jesus’ commission, as recorded in Matthew 28:19. First it belonged to the eleven apostles, but subsequently it included Paul, who took the place of Judas and who was “not a whit behind the very chiefest apostles.” (II Cor. 11:5) The apostles, and they alone, are authorized as direct and inspired mouthpieces of the Lord Jesus Christ. All that has been claimed as to apostolic bishops being successors is unscriptural. The twelve apostles had no successors; in fact, they are with us yet. The Master’s message through them is given to us in the New Testament, of which one of them wrote, “All scripture is given by inspiration of God, ... That the man of God may be ... thoroughly furnished.” (II Tim. 3:16,17) To the apostles was given the great work of inaugurating the church. They were endued with this power at Pentecost.

Jesus appointed the twelve apostles to be his mouthpieces to the church, and declared that whatsoever they would bind on earth we might know was bound in heaven, and that whatsoever they would declare was not bound on earth was not bound in the sight of heaven. (Matt. 16:19; 18:18) Nevertheless, the Lord arranged that each member of the church should also be his representative, and that each in proportion to their opportunity and ability might have a share in proclaiming the

Gospel message. Whoever has fully consecrated, or dedicated, themselves to God and who then receives the Spirit of begetting, the anointing, is included in the statement of the prophet as a member of the body of Christ, under the anointed Head, Jesus.

Thus we read, "The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me; because the LORD hath anointed me to preach good tidings unto the meek; he hath sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound." (Isa. 61:1-3) Everyone who receives the Holy Spirit is thus ordained, or authorized, to tell forth the Gospel message, according to his or her opportunity or limitation of circumstances or conditions. One limitation of the apostle is that the sisters are not to teach in a formal gathering of the church. (I Tim. 2:12; 3:1,2) Aside from this singular scriptural limitation, however, there are plenty of opportunities for all.

Evidently, therefore, a great mistake has been made in the arrangement of a clergy class, who declare themselves to be the only ones who are ordained, or authorized, to preach or to teach God's message. Jesus and the apostles knew nothing of a clergy class or of a laity class. On the contrary, our Lord declared, "One is your Master, even Christ; and all ye are brethren." (Matt. 23:8-10) Jesus and his twelve apostles especially forbade anything approaching a lordship amongst his followers—anything such as a clerical class.—Mark 10:42-44; I Pet. 5:1-3

THE CHURCH'S COMMISSION

The message given is, "Therefore go and make disciples in all the nations." (Matt. 28:19, *The Living*

Bible) The commission is not to make the nations disciples, but, as elsewhere expressed, to gather out of all nations those willing to be disciples of Christ, whether rich or poor, learned or ignorant, noble or base. A disciple of Christ is a follower, one who learns, one who copies. Jesus defined this discipleship, saying that one who desires to follow him—that is, to be his disciple—must “deny” or set aside his own will and preferences, then “take up his cross,” as Jesus did, and follow him.—Matt. 16:24

The intimation is that all true followers of Christ, all true disciples, will find the path in which the Lord leads them a difficult one, in which their own fleshly wills must be continually “crossed,” or mortified. (Rom. 8:13; I Cor. 9:27; Col. 3:5) As such, it is a way in which they will have more or less difficulty, as well as suffering, according to the flesh. However, the promise of the Master is that eventually, “Where I am [in heavenly glory], there ye may be also.”—John 14:3

While Christians have properly viewed water immersion as a symbol of death to the world, death to self, and of rising to newness of life as members of the “body of Christ,” nevertheless water baptism is only a picture of a greater baptism. All of Jesus’ true followers are to recognize him as standing for righteousness. Christians are to become dead to every other principle than that which he represents, and to be thoroughly immersed into that name which is synonymous with righteousness, justice and truth.

Therefore, ignoring all other names, such as we find in abundance in the religious world, Christians are to be thoroughly baptized, or immersed, into

the name of Christ. (Acts 2:38; 8:16; 19:5) These become his members, his body, his church. (I Cor. 12:12-14,27; Col. 1:18,24) Furthermore, they are to be immersed into the recognition of the Holy Spirit—their own spirit and their own wills being dead. God’s holy will, his mind, and his holy purpose, are to be their will and purpose, as revealed and guided by his invisible power and influence—his Holy Spirit.

Yet today, we see our commission is the same as given to the disciples nearly two-thousand years ago as respects those of all nations who have an ear to hear our message. We are not to organize human systems and to call them kingdoms, churches or other names. We are merely to prepare the followers of Jesus, cooperating with God, who will work in each one individually “to will and to do of his good pleasure.”—Phil. 2:13

“TO THE END OF THE AGE”

The *King James* translation of our opening scripture states, “Lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world.” This rendering of Jesus’ words has been misunderstood by many to signify that the world, including the literal earth, is to be destroyed. However, the Greek word translated “world,” means “age,” and is correctly rendered as such in a majority of updated translations. In other words, what the Master said, according to the Greek text, is that he would be with his people, even to the end of the age. This would be the time when the present Christian age will have accomplished its mission of gathering out a sufficient number of disciples of Christ to complete that part of the divine purpose. Then, the Gospel message

shall have accomplished its present work of the sanctification through obedience to the Truth of a proper number to complete the bride of Christ in glory, the royal priesthood.—Rev. 14:1-4; 19:7,8

Thus, the end of the present age will have come. The Master himself will have gathered his elect, to glorify them with himself, and to establish his kingdom for the blessing of the world of mankind. Then will come to reality the vision John saw: “And I John saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a great voice out of heaven saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God. And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away. And he that sat upon the throne said, Behold, I make all things new.”—Rev. 21:2-5■