

THE GREAT COMMISSION

2024

Dear Reader,

I recently came across these comments about the current situation in our country. “We are watching our country freefall into godless darkness, sexual perversion, gender insanity, crime of all kinds, the breakdown of law and order, family destruction, and above all, the constant flood of lies and efforts to silence the truth.”¹

Given the significant decline at various levels of our society, many of us are undoubtedly asking questions and seeking answers... Considering the upcoming presidential elections, one question that is likely to be on people's minds is: can we expect our elected government to improve our country? As far as I'm concerned, I believe that our leaders, no matter who they are, are incapable of changing the root cause of our problems: a sinful heart. Jesus Himself stated, “For it is from within, out of a person's heart, that evil thoughts come—sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, greed, malice, deceit, lewdness, envy, slander, arrogance and folly. All these evils come from inside and defile a person.”² After reading these words from the One who knows everyone's hearts and deepest thoughts, it becomes evident that the solution lies in changing people's hearts, a goal that can only be achieved through God's grace. In his epistle to Titus, the apostle Paul wrote, “For the grace of God has appeared that offers salvation to all people. It teaches us to say “No” to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age...”³

In these troubled times, even Christians may be tempted to despair. How often do I hear us say: Where's our country going to? It's never been that bad! Hoping the rapture comes soon... Jesus clearly outlined several signs of the end times, which are increasingly evident in our world today, but He didn't give an exact time when they will occur. As far as the rapture is concerned, we're certainly waiting for this glorious day with hope and great expectation. “For the Lord Himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever.”⁴

As Christians, we're also eagerly anticipating Jesus' return. Here again, the Lord wasn't specific about the date or time for His return. He simply stated that no one knows when it will happen; including Himself and the angels. Only God the Father knows the exact timing of Christ's second coming. The apostle Peter, however, gives us some insight and encouragement on the matter through a letter he wrote to his fellow believers. He said, “Do not forget this one thing, dear friends: With the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day. The Lord is not slow in keeping His promise, as some understand slowness. Instead He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.”⁵ Jesus is coming back! He could arrive at any time, and we need to be prepared. But while we wait for Him, this scripture should be a source of inspiration for us to live for Jesus with greater passion and eagerness to tell others about Him while we still have the opportunity. We cannot stay silent...

I think about our family members, friends, acquaintances, neighbors, co-workers and everyone we come in contact with every day. Some of them may not have heard about or acknowledged the love, mercy and compassion of God towards them. These people are just like us before someone testified to us about Jesus: spiritually blind and foolish. The Word of God says, “The natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.”⁶ In essence, humanity as a whole has no perception of divine reality. “But whenever anyone turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away”.⁷ Oh, thank God for that! It was through that special someone's prayers, testimony, and the Holy Spirit convicting us that we were given the gift of salvation, a personal relationship with God, and the promise of eternal life in His presence in heaven. Oh, what a glorious day that will be! But we're not there yet...

Before Jesus left this world, the Bible says that the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had told them to go. When they saw Him, they worshiped Him; but some doubted. Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."⁸ Then, a wonderful thing happened! His apostles began demonstrating the same kind of Kingdom power that their Lord Himself had manifested. By their faithful obedience they turned Jerusalem, and then the world upside down. And today, the same commission is being given to us... What greater evidence of God's love could there be than the life of Jesus Himself, His death and resurrection, and the living testimonies of the transforming, supernatural power of Christ in our own lives?

I understand that not everyone is called to be evangelist or missionary. However, as followers of Christ, we're commissioned to spread the gospel around us. A good friend of mine who passed away recently is a great example of how committed she was to this great commission. Every person she met or spoke to was an opportunity for her to talk about the Lord. With her beautiful smile and cheerful personality, she would always ask the same question and make the same comment: "Do you know Jesus? He loves you!" That was her way of starting a conversation about what her Savior and Lord had done in her life, as well as what He can do for them when they truly believe in Him. Although she might have been ridiculed by some people, I'm sure that she has touched many hearts for the Lord... I believe that Jesus greeted her with these words at the end of her life: "Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master's happiness!"⁹

In His Sermon on the Mount, Jesus used the analogy of salt and light to teach His disciples how they were to live out their lives. Therefore, as salt adds flavor to the food, so are we to season the world with the goodness of God through our actions and words. And as the light shines in the darkness, so also are we to shine the light of Christ on a spiritually dark world. In essence, we're called to be an ongoing witness to the reality of Jesus' presence in our lives. In practical terms, how do we respond to His calling?

Above all, by sharing the message of the gospel; by showing His love, mercy, and compassion to those we come in contact with; by being a living testimony that Jesus has the power to change hearts and lives; by praying earnestly and faithfully for the people of our nation, and for those who govern it. In fact, it all boils down to this: once reconciled with God, people will begin to live godly lives and, in turn, they will become His witnesses to those around them. Does it sound too simplistic or even unrealistic? Maybe to some people, but we can never underestimate the fervent prayers and testimony of true believers, and the power of God to answer them and convict people's hearts.

Let's ask ourselves... Are my words and expressions of faith pointing others to Christ? Are they indicative of His evident power and the presence of His Holy Spirit within me? As we reflect about that, we also need to realize that the fate of many individuals around us depends on how seriously we take this Great Commission that Jesus has given us... In the end, however, it'll be their own decision to make. Either they will experience the eternal blessings of living with God or they will forever endure the terrors of hell.

Oh, heavenly Father, give us a genuine and caring heart for the lost, so we may be bold witnesses for Christ... Open the hearts and minds of those who walk in darkness; who doubt that Jesus is the only way to you, the truth and the life; who no longer have faith in Him... May they be convicted and believe in your only Son, Jesus, as the Savior who willingly came and died for them to pay for their sins, so they be reconciled with you and have eternal life... And as they do, empower them with your Holy Spirit to live a transformed life that is pleasing to you, honors you, and is a testimony of your amazing love for all sinners... Amen.

Beth

¹John MacArthur, pastor, Grace Community Church, CA ²Mark 7:22-23 ³Titus 2:11-12 ⁴1 Thessalonians 4:16-17 ⁵2 Peter 3:8-9
⁶1 Corinthians 2:14 ⁷2 Corinthians 3:16 ⁸Matthew 28:16-20 ⁹Matthew 25:23