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THE CHURCH'S GREAT COMMISSION.

– MATT. 28:16-28. – *MAY 12.* –

"Lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world [age]."

OUR Lord's next manifestation to his disciples was near the close of the forty days of his invisible presence after his resurrection. It was, according to our reckoning, the sixth occasion of the kind, and much more marked in some respects than previous ones, for, in common with others, we believe that at this time our Lord manifested himself not only to the eleven apostles mentioned in our lesson, but also to the whole multitude of believers whom the Apostle Paul mentions as being "over five hundred brethren." (1 Cor. 15:6.) This meeting, we are informed, was by special appointment of time and place; hence there was an opportunity for all the deeply interested ones to be gathered together. Dr. Bordman suggests some of those composing [R2809 : page 152] this number to have been "the eleven apostles; the seventy evangelists; Mary of Nazareth; Mary of Magdala; Mary of Bethany; Mary the wife of Cleophas; Mary the mother of John Mark; Martha, and Joanna and Susanna, and the woman of Jacob's Well; Peter's wife's mother and the impotent man of Bethsaida; the centurion of Capernaum and the widow of Nain; the penitent woman of Simon's feast and the woman healed on the way; Jairus and his daughter and Bartimeus; the Syro-Phoenician woman, and the deaf mute of Decapolis; the grateful leper of Samaria and the woman bound with the spirit of infirmity; Zacchaeus and Lazarus, whom he raised from the dead; and the blind and deaf and mute and halt and palsied and lunatic whom he had healed; and Joseph and Nicodemus." We would certainly expect these to be amongst our Lord's friends who had great confidence in him, and who, after experiencing great

disappointment respecting his death would have great hopes enkindled in their hearts through the reports of the apostles of his resurrection and his manifestations to them.

Wise was the plan which gave to his followers the "infallible proofs" of his resurrection, and the instructions necessary to appreciation of the same, in so gradual a manner as we have seen. Three manifestations on the day of our Lord's resurrection; one a week later, on the eighth day; the fifth probably two weeks later on the 22nd day after his resurrection, and now the sixth manifestation, probably ten days after that, about the thirty-second day. Thus gradually the two lessons necessary were taught: (1), the *fact* of our Lord's resurrection, that he was no longer dead but alive; and (2) that he was "*changed*," that he was no longer "the *man* Christ Jesus," but that he was now "a quickening *spirit*," manifesting the powers and attributes which they knew belonged to spirit beings – invisibility and power to appear in various forms as a man – power to come and go as the wind, none knowing whence he came or whither he went. – John 3:8.

We note the wisdom manifested in the order of the appearances also: first to Mary, who seems to have been a woman full of faith as well as full of zeal, and one whose word would have influence with the apostles; next Peter, a leader amongst them, was convinced; then the remainder of the eleven, except Thomas, who doubted; then the eleven, Thomas included, and perhaps some of the women with them, not mentioned; then what would seem to them the long interim of non-appearance, in which some of them started back again to the fishing business; then the convincing of these that the risen Lord had all the power that he ever possessed, and was as able to be with them and to guide them and to provide for their necessities as when he was a man, and with them daily in the flesh; then the instruction of them that their mission should still be to feed his sheep and his lambs; and his

appointment for this general meeting, which would be rendered doubly forceful by reason of its previous appointment.

The time had come; the friends of Jesus were gathered; for nearly five weeks they had been studying the great lessons of divine providence connected with the death and resurrection of the Lord, and how all these could happen to him and he still be the promised Messiah – yea, as he explained, how all these things were necessary to him in order that he might be the Messiah and accomplish all the great and wonderful work predicted in Holy Writ – how he must first suffer to redeem mankind, before, as the King of Glory, he should be fully authorized and empowered to bless them with eternal life and all the privileges and blessings proper to the redeemed and reconciled.

When they saw him they worshiped him, "but some doubted." The ones who doubted we cannot reasonably suppose to have been any of the eleven apostles, for they were fully satisfied, thoroughly convinced, and had so expressed themselves previously. Those who doubted must, we think, have been of the "five hundred brethren" present at this appointed meeting, who had had no previous intercourse with him since his resurrection, and some of whom, we may reasonably suppose, were much weaker in the faith than the apostles and the special friends already communed with. The statement that "some doubted" is an evidence of the candor of the Evangelist's record. It shows us, too, that the Lord's followers were not over credulous, but rather disposed to sift and weigh the evidences presented, and the subsequent zeal, energy and self-sacrificing spirit of those who believed gives us abundant evidence of the sincerity of their convictions respecting our Lord's resurrection, which they as well as we recognize to be the very keystone of our faith in him. If Christ be not risen our faith is vain and we are yet in our sins. – 1 Cor. 15:17.

When our Lord appeared his message was the very one they needed to have impressed, and which he had been to some extent impressing at his previous appearances. It was that all *power* in heaven and in earth had been given unto him. We are not to understand by this that the Father had abdicated or surrendered any of his own power or authority, but rather are to remember that, as the Apostle Paul elsewhere states, in any such declaration the Father is always excepted. (1 Cor. 15:27.) Nor are we to understand that our Lord meant that power and authority were given him to set aside or overrule or violate any feature of the [R2809 : page 153] divine law and plan. We are rather to understand his words to mean this: I came into the world to do the Father's will, and by manifesting my obedience to that will, and fulfilling its demands, to not only redeem mankind from the sentence of death through Adam, but also to secure to myself the title and *authority* promised of the Father to belong to the Messiah. From the time I made my consecration I was *reckoned* to be the Messiah, but my Messiahship depended upon my faithfulness even unto death – even the death of the cross. I was faithful in this, and as a reward the Father has raised me up from the dead, a partaker of the divine nature, and the heir of all the gracious promises and blessings before mentioned as pertaining to Messiah. All this Messianic power and authority that was once mine reckonedly or prospectively is now mine *actually*; for I have finished the work which the Father gave me to do, and that acceptably; and its acceptance has been manifested in my resurrection to my present condition of spiritual glory and power. – Acts 17:31.

"Therefore go ye, disciple all nations." Their commission to go and spread him as Messiah was based on the fact that the Father had accepted his work, finished at Calvary, and had *recognized* him with full authority as Messiah, by his resurrection from the dead: *therefore* we may preach Jesus, the power of God and the channel of all his promised mercies and

blessings to all who have "an ear to hear," to all nations, and not, as previously, to the Jewish nation only.

Following the assurance of his *authority* as the Messiah, our Lord, addressing especially the eleven apostles, but indirectly, with and through them, addressing all his followers, gave them and us the great commission under which we, his people, have since been operating. It might be termed the *ordination* of his apostles and all his followers as preachers, ambassadors, members of the royal priesthood, speaking and teaching in the name of the Master, the fully empowered Messiah. The commission divides itself into three parts: (1) "Make disciples of all nations;" (2) "baptizing them;" (3) "teaching them." The word teach, in the Common Version (vs. 19) is not from the same Greek word rendered "teach" in vs. 20. The word in vs. 19 signifies proselytizing or making disciples of. The word "teach" in vs. 20 signifies instruct.

A wrong thought is derived from this text by many students of the Scriptures, when they consider it to mean, Go and convert all nations. This is not the thought, but rather, Go ye and gather converts from all nations, and baptize them and teach them, etc. This view is in accord with our Master's declaration on other occasions, in which he testified that they would not be converted at his second coming, but quite the reverse: "When the Son of Man cometh, shall he find faith on the earth?" This interpretation is in harmony with our Lord's statement in Matt. 24:14, "This Gospel of the Kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a *witness* unto all the nations; and then shall the end come." Whoever gets the wrong thought respecting the commission is apt to take the wrong action in his endeavor to comply with it. Those who have concluded that the Lord intended the conversion of the world are led to various subterfuges, both in mind and in conduct, in order to attempt to carry out the commission they misunderstand. This is leading some at the present time to ignore

the Scriptural definition of the terms of membership in Christ's Kingdom – to lower the standard both of faith and of conduct, in order to admit a larger proportion of the human family and in order to, if possible, convince themselves and others that the world is growing better and being converted. Some have not only concluded that the preaching of the cross of Christ and faith in the redemption is unnecessary but have even gone further than this, and have claimed that even a historical knowledge of Christ is unnecessary, and that heathen religions are to be esteemed as part of the preaching of the Gospel, and that the heathen obedience to their religious customs is to be esteemed as obedience to the Gospel. Thus more or less false views of the commission are leading astray many who see no hope in any other way of ever attaining to that which our Lord commissioned nearly nineteen centuries ago, and which otherwise they would feel has thus far failed most miserably, and has no hope of ever being accomplished. **[R2810 : page 153]**

On the other hand we hold that the commission rightly read and understood has been fulfilled; that the message of Christ and the Kingdom has been proclaimed, directly or indirectly, with more or with less force and energy, in every nation under heaven, and that as a result some from every nation have been made disciples; and that incidentally a "witness" has been given to all the peoples of the earth respecting the redemption and the divine provision for salvation through the Redeemer. Of these disciples gathered out of all nations by the message of the Lord a "little flock" will be found to whom it will be the Father's good pleasure to give the Kingdom, in joint-heirship with Jesus in glory as the Seed of Abraham, through whom, in the Millennial age to follow this, all the families of the earth shall be blessed. From this standpoint only can our Lord's commission be properly appreciated and its fulfilment recognized.

DISCIPLING THE WORLD.

The work of the Evangelist comes first – Go, make disciples of as many as will hear your message. The word "disciple" signifies pupil, [R2810 : page 154] and those interested through the evangelist are only supposed to be pupils in the school of Christ, in the primary department. As they become instructed in righteousness their full consecration is in order, as represented in *baptism* – death to self and to the world – buried with Christ by baptism into his death. (Rom. 6:3-5.) Then comes the third step, *teaching them* to observe all things whatsoever Christ commanded. Any neglect of this commission and its order of procedure means comparative failure; and yet on every hand we see that its specific features are neglected. We find the majority of professed Christians giving the baptism first, in a wrong order as well as of a wrong kind. Secondly, they disciple them into sectarian denominations and make them members of these, and get them to consecrate their money and energies to these rather than to the Lord. Thirdly, having thus gotten them into sectarian bondage they neglect them, and go out after others, failing entirely to give them the "*teaching*" which the Lord indicates is necessary as a preparation for joint-heirship in his Kingdom – *teaching* respecting the divine character and plan, and the graces of the holy spirit and the necessity for rooting out the spirit of worldliness and selfishness, and developing the spirit of the Lord, – meekness, gentleness, patience, brotherly kindness, love.

To follow the Lord's instruction the Royal Priesthood should first, when discipling, inform those who have ears to hear that they are sinners through the fall; – imperfect in thought, in word and in act; and consequently unacceptable to God and under sentence of death, extinction; but that God has made a provision for their rescue, and their return to harmony with him and to life everlasting: that Christ Jesus, in harmony with the Father's plan, paid the penalty of Adamic sin and condemnation, and thus

purchased the whole race of Adam, and proposes to set at liberty all who obey him. That now he is offering *release by faith* to as many as have the hearing ear – "even as many as the Lord your God shall call," and that such as hear and accept the call may reckon themselves as "justified by faith," as having their sins covered, and as being thus reconciled to the Father through faith in Christ; and that now, if they become followers or disciples of Christ they may become joint-sacrificers with him, and by and by be made joint-heirs in his Kingdom, and its great work of blessing the world.

So many as are interested in the message will inquire the way by which they can attain this, and the answer must be that the full acceptance of discipleship must be indicated by a full consecration, heart, mind and body, to the Lord – even unto death; and that this submission of the will to the Lord is counted as a *baptism*, a burial, an immersion with him into death; and that as soon as they have performed this real baptism or immersion of the will they should submit themselves to an outward immersion in water, which would symbolize this, portraying their death and burial to self, to sin and to the world, and their resurrection to newness of life and conduct as members of the body of Christ.

They are to be urged to take this step of consecration unto death, not in their own strength or name, nor in the name of their instructor; but are to be pointed to the fact that this course is authorized by the Father, by the Son and by the Holy Spirit. It is thus to be done "in the name of" or by the authority of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, and not in the name of a sect or denomination or any human teacher. It is a mistake on the part of some to consider this text to mean that converts are to be baptized *into* the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. On the contrary the Apostle distinctly declares, that we are baptized *into* Christ as members of *his body*. – Rom. 6:3-5.*

*See our issue of [June 15, 1893](#), "Baptism and Its Import," a sample copy of which will be loaned free upon request with promise to return it.

Those who go thus far, who respond to the preaching of the Gospel, and inquire concerning the way, the truth and the life, and who, with true repentance from sin and contrition of heart, desire to become disciples of Christ, and who then take this step of consecration, are baptized thereby into the *Church*, "the body of Christ" – not the Baptist Church nor any other human institution, but the one true Church, the Church of the living God, whose names are written in heaven. ([Heb. 12:23](#).) They need not that their names should be written in any earthly roll or register. The names of such, we are told, are written in the Lamb's book of life, and if they are faithful to their covenant he will not blot out their names, he assures us. The seal of their acceptance is the holy spirit, whose leadings and instructions and marks of character become more and more discernible to them and to others daily, as they thereafter seek to walk in the footsteps of Jesus.

But still they will need instruction: in fact, all that has gone before in their Christian experience has merely prepared them to receive instruction; and when they have reached the condition of justification by faith, and then of sanctification (consecration to the Lord, baptism), they have merely become "babes in Christ." As such they are ready for spiritual food, and should first be fed with the sincere milk of the Word, that they may grow thereby, and as they make progress the Lord himself stands pledged to it that they shall have "meat in due season," and as they are able to bear it the "strong meat" which belongs to them that are developed, strong in the Lord and in [\[R2810 : page 155\]](#) the power of his might, "overcomers," soldiers of Christ, having on his armor and fighting a good fight, lifting high the royal banner, and active in helping others to attain the same conditions.

To Satan, our wily foe, we must credit the perversion of this great commission, so explicitly stated; making it meaningless as

we have seen: first by making it mean the conversion of the world; second, by destroying the real idea of baptism; third, by confusing the Lord's people as to the matter of discipling, and to make them think that it is gathering membership into sectarian bundles; fourth, to make them think that this is all that is necessary, and that teaching in the Church is a waste of time, which should be devoted to what the Adversary calls "saving souls," but what in reality is an endeavor to gather unregenerate people into sectarian systems and to delude them into thinking that they are in any sense of the word members of the true Church of Christ, and saved; fifth, by misleading those whom he cannot thus delude, but who realize that there is to be a growth in grace and in knowledge, into a misunderstanding of the Apostle's statement (mistranslated in our Common Version), "The anointing which ye have received of him abideth in you, and ye need not that any man teach you." – 1 John 2:20,27.

Under this last delusion many are turned aside from the instruction which the Lord designs should be given through teachers whom he would raise up – turned aside to vagaries, to dreams and imaginations and misinterpretations of Scripture which they fancy are whispered to them by the holy spirit, but which frequently give evidence of being the suggestions either of their own minds or of the fallen angels.

Let us, as the Lord's people, seeking for the old paths, note well the Master's instruction in this connection, and let each one of us who seeks to serve his cause labor exactly along the lines here marked out – not thinking that his own imperfect judgment or that of fellow-mortals is superior to the Lord's, but to the contrary, that the Lord, the Head of the Church, alone was competent to give the proper commission which must be followed implicitly.

That our Lord gave this commission, not merely to the apostles but to all who should believe on him through their word, is clearly shown by the words with which he closed the commission, – "Lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the age." The apostles did not live to the end of the age, and hence the Lord's words signify that he will be with all of his followers who avail themselves of his commission, and who endeavor to present his message to those who have ears to hear out of all nations. He of course did not mean that he would be personally present with them, for he had already told them that personally he would go away, and that personally he would come again at the end of the age (John 14:2), and his words are not to be understood as contradictory. His meaning in **[R2811 : page 155]** the present instance evidently was that he would supervise their work, he would be the real head of the Church, he would oversee all of their affairs, he would be with them in the sense of supporting and guiding and counselling those who would walk in his way and proclaim his message – and in proportion as they were faithful to the charge. This assurance of the Lord's presence was intended to give the apostles courage for the work he was committing to them. While he was with them in the flesh they merely followed his direction, and as soon as he was smitten they felt as sheep having no shepherd, and now he was going away, but he wished them to realize that his power would be with them and his supervising guidance of their affairs would be granted them, as surely as while he was with them in the flesh – tho apparent only to the eye of faith. According to their faith it should be unto them a strength, a power.

And all the way down through the age the Lord's people have similarly been required to walk by faith and not by sight, and the lesson no doubt has been valuable to them in spiritual upbuilding, much more so than had he remained in the flesh with us. And if the thought of the Lord's spiritual supervision of his work was to be a source of encouragement and strength to those who would

attempt to teach in his name all through the age, much more may we of the present time realize his actual presence in the harvest of this Gospel age, altho we see him with no other than the eye of faith, yet, believing, we have joy unspeakable and strength and courage for the work. He is with us in the harvest work as he was with the apostles in the sowing of the seed.

Surely he who was careful to supervise the sowing work is not less interested and careful in respect to the reaping. Let us then thrust in the sickle of truth with energy and courage, remembering that we serve the Lord Christ, remembering that we are not responsible for the harvest but merely for our energy in gathering what ripe "wheat" we can find. If the labor be great for the finding of few grains of ripe wheat we are to rejoice the more in those we do find, and learn to love and appreciate the more that which is scarce and precious. Let us remember, too, while using all the wisdom we can in this service, that the Lord's object in giving us a share in his work is not so much what we can accomplish as in the blessing that the labor will bring upon us. This will be an encouraging thought to the dear ones who are engaged in the "Volunteer" work; and if they find many discouragements and but **[R2811 : page 156]** small results the reflection that the Master knoweth them that are his, and that he appreciates every sincere effort made to serve his cause and to lay down our lives on behalf of the brethren, will give courage and strength to those who otherwise might faint by the way.
