

Bible Studies for Life: April 21

Sharing Christ • Matt. 28:18-20, 2 Cor. 5:16-21

By Carl M. White



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Commission. The Webster Collegiate Dictionary defines this as a command or duty given to a group of people. It is like a charge, or a challenge.

Great. The American Dictionary says that great, in part, refers to something that is immense, enormous, and grand. Put these together and you have an enormous challenge.

President John Kennedy stood before Congress on May 25, 1961, and proposed “that the United States should commit itself to achieving the goal, before this decade is out, of landing a man on the moon and returning him safely to the Earth.” This was a big challenge, but not everyone thought so. A Gallup poll said 58% of Americans were opposed to the idea. Yet, it caught on and we did it.

What makes a challenge work? Successful challenges are visionary. They charge the imagination. They are centered in a large vision that has room for everyone and enables people to stretch themselves. People can imagine themselves being part of it. But to be a truly great challenge, it must convince people that something so good will come from it and is worth dedicating your life to it.

While President Kennedy’s challenge was indeed big, it is nothing like the Great Commission. This is God’s great plan of salvation, and there is no other challenge that compares.

Consider the results. At the time of resurrection of Christ, there were his eleven remaining disciples and a few dozen other people. By the year 2022, over one-third of the population of the world was at least nominally Christian,

making Christianity the largest religion in the world.

Christianity is the largest, but it is not the fastest growing faith in the world. Islam is, slightly. Yet, indications are that in 2022 there were 2.56 billion Christians in the world. By 2050 it is estimated there will be 3.33 billion (2022 Status of Global Christianity). The church is still growing. Matthew 28:18-20 is indeed a Great Commission!

Sadly, this growth is not happening in Europe or in the United States. Africa is the most Christian continent on Earth and will continue to be (ibid). We still have much work to do.

Paul caught the vision of this Commission and made it the goal of his life. As the first Christian missionary, he understood the urgency of it, traveling the world of Rome and sharing the Gospel of Christ. In 2 Cor. 5:16-21, he articulates for us exactly what the challenge is and how to accomplish it.

The challenge is to point persons towards the new birth (2 Cor 5:17). A basic human need is to be able to change. This is so much more than self-improvement. Churches that emphasize only self-improvement fall short of the Gospel. In Christ, a person becomes a *new creation*. This is more organic and more spiritual, having to do with our very nature as creations of God. Old things, like old allegiances and old habits, pass away. New things come, and they come not from the Baptist Building but from God himself, articulated in his Word and empowered by His Spirit.

The first audacious claim of Christianity is that the creator God was at work in Jesus, who was God in the flesh. His work was reconciliation. That word speaks of restoring a relationship. Humanity is alienated from the creator by sin and has no way of making the relationship right again. Thus, God acted. As Paul writes, “...*God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ...*” (vs. 19a). Paul goes on to write, “*God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we*

might become the righteousness of God” (vs. 21).

This is how God reconciles us. Our sin alienates us from God. Jesus took our sin upon himself. This is how a man or woman becomes a Christian.

That’s the first audacious claim of Christianity. The second audacious claim is that we can join God in this ministry of reconciliation. Paul says, “*We are ambassadors for Christ.*” We get to represent God. We get to participate in his work. We get to tell, preach, implore, even beg people on God’s behalf to be made right with God in Christ.

This is the ministry of reconciliation, which is a greater challenge than going to the moon. It is our challenge, our Great Commission. The only question is, are you up for the challenge?

White is a member of Pineview Church, Clinton.