

The Great Commission

By Rev. Jeannette Flynn

I am often intrigued by how the storyline in various scriptures weaves throughout the Bible. For instance, in Acts 19 Luke records the loving relationship, amazing miracles and powerful establishment of the church at Ephesus when Paul visited there. That story is picked up again and given more clarity and fuller understanding of what an exciting and spiritually alive church this had grown to be when Paul later writes his letter to this Ephesian church. Several decades pass, and we are stunned by the message Jesus sends to the same church in Revelation 2:1-7, "...Remember your first love and return to it or I will remove you." It is quite a wakeup call to each of us! Having a history of being alive, growing, even having experienced miracles, does not prevent us from "drifting" out of a vibrant relationship with God into ritual and routine void of passion.

Recently I have been caught up with three other passages that seem to interweave and capture my mind and attention. This storyline is compressed into just 10 days and the passages are brief, let me share them with you.

Following the resurrection
and 40 days of "risen" interaction with the disciples.

The Proclamation:

"Then 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 commended you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."
Matthew 28:16 - 20

While they are still on the mountain with Jesus...

The Provision

"Lord, are you at this time going to restore the Kingdom to Israel?" He said to them: 'It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.'" Acts 1:6 - 8

Ten days later

The Product

"When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place. Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting. They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them." Acts 2:1 - 4

This is really one storyline that is woven into the fabric of the scripture. Too often though we separate these passages and deal with them separately. While they can indeed stand on their own - I fear that doing so repeatedly weakens the real strength of complete story. Over the next few weeks, I want to look at the elements found in each of these passages and the power of their united message.

The Matthew passage has come to be called “the Great Commission.” It is evident even to the causal reader that Jesus is sending them out as his disciples. However, look more closely at the passage.

*They
worshipped
Him...*

That shouldn't be surprising! Lazarus (not even 60 days out of the tomb) is still walking around talking and eating. They have been to the empty tomb where Jesus' body had been secured – but now it is abandoned! The disciples have witnessed him pass through locked doors and enter their presence with grace and love. They have touched his hands and side. They have eaten fish with Him at the shore of the Sea of Galilee. He has undoubtedly explained to them

again the Father's plan –

yet... “they doubted.” He has done all he can do to reveal He has done all he can do to impart hope and courage to some doubted.

*...But some
doubted*

himself to them.
their hearts – but

I love the response of Jesus to this “*skeptical worship.*”

**“ALL
AUTHORITY
IS GIVEN
ME.**

**IN
HEAVEN...
AND ON
EARTH!”**

Wouldn't you love to have seen their expressions?
Don't you imagine some of them thought,
“Busted again!”

You see the truth of the matter is the proclamation doesn't start with Jesus sending them out! It starts with Him addressing their own doubts and His Lordship.

We are never going to be effective witnesses unless we have first allowed God to address the doubts, fears, unbelief, sin and dissonance in our hearts and minds! Until we come face to face with what is holding us back – our lack of faith, our timidity, our worries, envy, unforgiveness we will never be convincing witnesses of a Savior capable of resurrection power!

Have you ever met a salesman or professional who either doesn't really believe in his own product or is unwilling to practice what they were pushing? I know Respiratory Therapists who smoke, Doctors who are obese, Yugo dealers who drove Buicks. They have the right words, they've learned the phrases and details about their product, but it is evident to me (and probably anyone else around) they are not committed to this product and there is no passion. This is their “job” not their heart! That may have been why the church at Ephesus had drifted. I wonder if sometimes as ministers or lay leaders we believe (worship) with our lips but doubt with our minds and hearts? The truth is if we live that way long enough it begins to “feel” normal and we are blind to our own condition. Doubt becomes so much a part of our being, thinking, doing that we are unaware of how far from spirit-filled faith living we have drifted.

The second truth he was imparting to them was that He has the authority to be their “Lord – Master” right here and right now in the day to day. His authority is not limited to the courts of heaven. His authority is not just spiritual! He has conquered sin, death and hell! He not only created it all – he stepped into his creation and he has authority over it! At his command wild waves lay still, broken bodies mend, demons depart their victims and his disciples count position, power, even material goods as rubbish so they can know him fully and obey him completely.

Before He instructed them to “GO”, He wanted them to know it wasn’t a request from their friend, their rabbi. It was a command by their Master – Go and do this! Now I have met a lot of folks over my ministry – who ‘used’ God as their scapegoat, not their Master. I’ve had people who could look me in the eye and tell me God gave them peace in their heart about having an affair, getting a divorce, and devastating two extended families including their own children. I’ve had pastors tell me God told them to do thus and so and the result was a broken congregation and wounded people in every direction. I’ve had lay leaders resolutely defend their hateful, mean spirited, attitudes and actions as standing up for God. I’ve had congregations (pastors and leaders together) meet week after week and watch numbers dwindle, resources wasted on their own preferences, no souls saved in months or even years, the baptistry filled with cobwebs and 5 year old Christmas decorations and tell me how much they love God and how they are “standing firm in the truth in these trying times.” I have news for you! All of those people had long ago passed Ephesus and kept right on going! Some of them knew it and kept on going and some of them didn’t – but their location was still the same – beyond Ephesus!

Recognizing Jesus authority over us is inclusive of both acts of commission AND omission. There really is no middle ground where we can just set up a tent and wait for his return. His words and direction left no space for simply being good people who are kind and thoughtful, who know the scripture and doctrines. His authority is without limit and his instruction is without question! “GO and make disciples.”

Before we can examine the command, we must determine if we have settled the doubts in our own hearts and mind. Do we believe who he said he is? Do we believe he can and will do all he promised or has life, ministry, relationships and the journey left us with some distorted living that is leading us to Ephesus? Are we pushing the goods but not accessing the power day to day? Are we worshipping.... but doubting?

How about his authority? Paul said, “I buffet my body daily to bring it under submission; I am taking every thought captive and breaking down every stronghold!” Are we growing in our obedience, our thoughts, our attitudes? What is our spirit when we aren’t chosen, when it doesn’t go our way? How about what we know he called us to do – how’s the passion in my heart and life for feeding the sheep and winning the lost? Has it become more of a job than the passion of first love?

Well, it’s a good place to start before we follow the storyline any farther. It was where Jesus started. It is a great place to really begin worshipping, confessing, letting go of doubt and prepare your heart for the proclamation and provision that is about to come.

Praying with you,

Jeannette Flynn