

Our Mission



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Matt. 5:14–16; Luke 24:48, 49; John 20:21; Matt. 28:19, 20; Rev. 14:6–12.*

Memory Text: “‘And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in all the world as a witness to all the nations, and then the end will come’” (*Matthew 24:14, NKJV*).

Early in Jesus' ministry, He called Peter and Andrew to be His disciples, which meant that they were to lead others to Him: “‘Follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men’” (*Matt. 4:19, NKJV*). Later, the Lord appointed 12 disciples “that they might be with Him and that He might send them out to preach” (*Mark 3:14, NKJV*). Christ sent out the Twelve Apostles and later 70 disciples to evangelize as well (*Matt. 10:5–15, Luke 10:1–12*). During the 40 days after His resurrection, Christ appeared several times to His disciples (*1 Cor. 15:3–8*), and He placed the responsibility of preaching the gospel in their hands (*Acts 1:2, 3*). Again and again He entrusted them with the gospel commission. Though none of the gospel writers recorded every word Jesus said, each one set down a few sentences of the Lord's instructions, each account emphasizing a different aspect of the gospel commission and thus providing us with valuable insight into its purpose, methodology, and scope.

This week we'll look at the gospel commission as Jesus Himself presented it.

* *Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, August 30.*

To Be the Light of the World

Read Matthew 5:14–16. What is Jesus saying here to each of us individually and as a church community?

Throughout the Bible, light is intimately associated with God. “The LORD is my light,” sang David (*Ps. 27:1*), and John stated that “God is light and in Him is no darkness at all” (*1 John 1:5, NKJV*). God is the source of light. In fact, the first thing He created was light, because light is indispensable for life.

Given the close connection between light and God, Scripture frequently uses light to symbolize truth, knowledge, and godliness. To walk in light means to have a character like God’s (*Eph. 5:8, 1 John 1:7*). Light stands for God; darkness, for Satan. That’s why it is a grievous sin to “put darkness for light, and light for darkness” (*Isa. 5:20*).

Jesus Christ, the eternal Son of God, is “‘the light of men, . . . the true Light which gives light to every man’” (*John 1:4, 9, NKJV*). He alone is the light that can illuminate the darkness of a world enshrouded in sin. Through Him we may have the “light of the knowledge of the glory of God” (*2 Cor. 4:6*), that is, His character.

When we accept Christ as our Savior, we become “‘sons of light’” (*John 12:36, 1 Thess. 5:5, NKJV*). But we have no light in ourselves. Like the moon, all we can do is reflect the light that shines upon us. When we let Jesus shine through us, we will not do good works to parade our own virtue but to lead people to glorify God.

“If Christ is dwelling in the heart, it is impossible to conceal the light of His presence. If those who profess to be followers of Christ . . . have no light to give, it is because they have no connection with the Source of light.”—Ellen G. White, *Thoughts From the Mount of Blessing*, p. 41.

Wouldn’t it be absurd to light a lamp only to put it “‘under a basket or under a bed’” (*Mark 4:21, NKJV*)? Then why is it that sometimes we do so with Christ’s light? A concealed disciple is no more useful than a lamp under a bowl on a dark night. Therefore, “arise, shine; for your light has come! and the glory of the LORD is risen upon you” (*Isa. 60:1, NKJV*).

Light itself is actually invisible. It has to be reflected off of something; otherwise we cannot see it. What spiritual lesson can we draw from this about how, as believers, our light is to be revealed?

To Be Witnesses

Jesus' first encounter with the disciples after His resurrection was very important. They were fearful, distressed, discouraged, and perplexed. They had locked the doors of the room out of fear, but Jesus came and stood in their midst. With a clear and warm voice He said to them: "Peace to you." Startled and terrified as they were, it was difficult for them to believe their eyes and ears. Lovingly, the Lord showed them His hands and His feet and explained to them everything the Scriptures said about Him. That night, His presence and His words transformed them dramatically, dispelling their anxiety and unbelief and filling them with the peace and joy that come from the certainty of His resurrection.

Then Christ began to expound their mission, gradually helping them to grasp the significance of their responsibility as witnesses of His death, His resurrection, and His power to forgive sins and to transform lives (*Luke 24:46–48*). They had surely seen Him die, but they had also seen Him alive again. So they could testify for Him, that He was the Savior of the world.

A witness is someone who has seen an event happen. Anyone can be a witness, provided that he or she has personally watched something. There is no such thing as a secondhand witness. We can testify based only on our own experiences, not on someone else's. As rescued sinners, we have the privilege of telling others what Jesus has done for us.

What is the relationship between receiving the Holy Spirit and witnessing for Christ? See *Luke 24:48, 49; Acts 1:8*. See also *Isa. 43:10, 12; 44:8*.

The book of Acts shows that the believers' testimony could have convincing power only through the presence of the Holy Spirit dwelling in their hearts. After receiving the Spirit, "with great power the apostles gave witness to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus" (*Acts 4:33, NKJV*). That is, they were able to speak, openly and with great power, about what they themselves had witnessed and experienced. In a very real sense, our witness about Christ must always include our own experience with Him.

What has been your own personal experience with the Lord? What has God done in your life that you can witness about firsthand to others? Bring your answer to class on Sabbath.

So Send I You

John's Gospel also reports Jesus' first encounter with the disciples in the upper room but mentions other elements not included in Luke's Gospel.

According to John, in what way did Jesus define the mission of the believers? *See John 20:21.*

Jesus had already mentioned this concept a few days before, when He prayed: “ ‘As You sent Me into the world, I also have sent them into the world’ ” (*John 17:18, NKJV*). Sending someone implies that the one who sends has authority over the one who is sent. It also involves a purpose, since one is sent with a mission to fulfill. Jesus was sent by the Father to save the world (*John 3:17*), and we are sent by Jesus to proclaim salvation through Him. Evidently, our commission is a continuation of Christ's work, which consisted of a complete ministry to all people (*Matt. 9:35*). He expects us not only to continue what He had initiated but also to go further. “ ‘He who believes in Me,’ ” said the Lord, “ ‘the works that I do he will do also; and greater works than these he will do’ ” (*John 14:12, NKJV*).

Jesus provided the Holy Spirit to enable the disciples to carry out their mission. At Creation, God “breathed into” Adam “the breath of life” (*Gen. 2:7*). Now Jesus “breathed on” the disciples “ ‘the Holy Spirit’ ” (*John 20:22, NKJV*). As the breath of life transformed lifeless dust into a living being, so the Holy Spirit transformed fearful and discouraged disciples into powerful living witnesses to continue Jesus' work. The same anointing is indispensable today to fulfill the commission entrusted to us.

Jesus has called you to be a witness. What can you witness about? That is, what have you seen or experienced that you should share with others about Jesus?

To Make Disciples

After His resurrection, Jesus met with His disciples in Galilee, at “the mountain which Jesus had appointed for them” (*Matt. 28:16, NKJV*). Not only the eleven, but also more than five hundred followers gathered there to meet the risen Lord (*1 Cor. 15:6*). The One who had conquered death said to them: “ ‘All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth’ ” (*Matt. 28:18, NKJV*). His power and authority are no longer voluntarily limited as they were during His earthly ministry. Rather, as before the Incarnation, His authority includes the whole universe. Based on His unquestionable authority, He entrusts a mission to His followers.

According to Matthew’s account, in giving the Great Commission, Jesus used four verbs: *go*, *make* disciples, *baptize*, and *teach*. Unfortunately, many Bible versions do not reflect on the fact that, in Greek, the only verb that is imperative is *make* disciples, while the other three verbs are participles. This means that the emphasis of the sentence is on *make* disciples, the other three activities being dependent on it.

What is the role of going, baptizing, and teaching in fulfilling the command to make disciples? See *Matt. 28:19, 20*.

Jesus’ mandate indicates three activities involved in making disciples. The three activities do not need to occur in a particularly sequential order; rather, they complement each other. While going to different places, eventually to the entire world, we should be teaching everything Jesus taught, baptizing those who accept Him as Savior and are willing to observe all the things Jesus commanded.

We rejoice when somebody is baptized, but baptism is not the end of the story. It is just part of the process of making someone a disciple. Our task is to invite people to follow Jesus, which means to believe in Him, to obey His teachings, to adopt His way of life, and to invite others to become His disciples, too.

The word *all* characterizes this text. Because Jesus has “all authority,” we have to go to “all the nations” teaching them to observe “all things” pertaining to the gospel, with the assurance that Christ is with us “always” (literally, “all the days”) to the end of the age.

Think about your local church. What is done there to help nurture and disciple new believers? What more can be done? Ask yourself, too: What talents do I have that I could use in this important part of fulfilling the gospel commission?

The Early Explosion

With its characteristic conciseness and clarity, the Gospel of Mark presents the commission in one short sentence: “‘Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature’” (*Mark 16:15, NKJV*). As in Matthew, the verb *go* in Greek is a participle that indicates not the task but the movement needed to fulfill the task. The mission itself is expressed by the Greek verb *Kērusso*, given here in the imperative mood. *Kērusso* means “to proclaim aloud, to announce, to preach.” Mark uses this term 14 times, more than any other Gospel. The church must proclaim the gospel.

During Jesus’ ministry, the Twelve had been sent not to the Gentiles but only “to the lost sheep of the house of Israel” (*Matt. 10:6*). Now they are sent “into all the world” and “to every creature.” The eleven alone could never announce the gospel to the entire world, much less to every creature living in it. A task of such worldwide dimension requires the participation of the entire church. It is entrusted to all the believers in Jesus in all ages. This includes you and me.

Read Revelation 14:6–12. How do these verses encompass the worldwide mission of the church?

Preaching the gospel to every creature, however, doesn’t automatically mean that everyone will accept it. Only “‘he who believes and is baptized will be saved’” (*Mark 16:16, NKJV*). We should preach eagerly, hoping that every hearer will yield to the gospel invitation. Nevertheless, we have to be aware that many will not accept the Word, as the image of the narrow gate clearly shows (*Matt. 7:13, 14*).

What assurance do we have that this worldwide mission can and will be fulfilled? See *Matt. 24:14*.

There is an encouraging parallelism between Mark 16:15 and Matthew 24:14. Both texts refer to the proclamation of the gospel to all the world. While the first passage presents Jesus’ commission to preach, the second gives Jesus’ promise that the mission will actually be carried out.

Christ “made full provision for the prosecution of the work, and took upon Himself the responsibility for its success. So long as they [His disciples] obeyed His word, and worked in connection with Him, they could not fail.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 822. The question, then, that we each need to ask ourselves is, *How willing are we to be used by Him in this crucial work?*

Further Study: Ellen G. White, “Go Teach All Nations,” pp. 818–828, in *The Desire of Ages*; “The Great Commission,” pp. 25–34, in *The Acts of the Apostles*.

“Every true disciple is born into the kingdom of God as a missionary. He who drinks of the living water becomes a fountain of life. The receiver becomes a giver. The grace of Christ in the soul is like a spring in the desert, welling up to refresh all, and making those who are ready to perish eager to drink of the water of life.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 195.

“The Saviour’s commission to the disciples included all the believers. It includes all believers in Christ to the end of time. It is a fatal mistake to suppose that the work of saving souls depends alone on the ordained minister. . . . All who receive the life of Christ are ordained to work for the salvation of their fellow men. For this work the church was established, and all who take upon themselves its sacred vows are thereby pledged to be co-workers with Christ.”—Page 822.

Discussion Questions:

- 1** Not everyone is able to travel the world preaching the gospel. What, though, are ways that each one of us can be involved in the task of spreading the gospel to the world in the context of the three angels’ messages?
- 2** In what ways is your local church continuing Jesus’ ministry in your community? How could you help to improve the church’s missionary service?
- 3** Jesus said that the gospel would go to all the world. For the vast majority of human history since He spoke those words, methods of communication had not changed. Two hundred years ago communication wasn’t much faster than it was 2,000 years ago, when Jesus gave us the gospel commission. Of course, all of that has changed, especially in the last 50 years, in which we have developed methods of communication that are amazing. How can we better learn to use the incredible technology we have been given in order to do the work that we have been promised will be done?
- 4** In class, based on the question at the end of Monday’s lesson, let those who are willing share their own personal experience with Jesus. How can we use our own testimony as a witness to others? Why should we use our own experience?

May's New School

May was overwhelmed in her new school. She had classes on topics that she had never studied before, and she didn't know enough English to understand what she was being taught. She hung her head and felt like crying. Her teacher touched her shoulder and asked if she needed help. May nodded, embarrassed. "Don't worry," her teacher said softly. "I'm here to help you. Tell me what you need."

May had never experienced such kindness from a teacher before. Softly she said, "I don't understand." The teacher knelt beside her and explained the lesson to her again. May smiled; she understood.

May lives in Myanmar. Her father, a Christian, wanted May to learn about God. When he learned about Yangon Adventist School (YAS), not far from where the family lived, he visited the school. It was an older building with crowded classrooms, but the children seemed happy and the teachers cared about their students. He enrolled May at YAS for the coming year.

May struggled with the new school curriculum, which was different from her previous school. She didn't know English well enough to understand what her teacher said. And Bible class was entirely new to her. But her teachers helped her, and May worked hard to catch up.

May liked that in her new school students worked together to learn new lessons rather than compete for the top ranking in the class. She discovered that learning was fun!

May made friends and enjoyed learning new subjects. Two years later she asked to be baptized, and her parents willingly gave their permission. May continued to study and mature; she learned what it means to follow Jesus completely.

May completed high school at YAS and enrolled in elementary education at the Seventh-day Adventist college in Myanmar.

She's glad to be an Adventist and a member of God's family. But as the only Adventist in her family, May sometimes feels separated from her relatives. "I wish we all could worship God together with the same faith," she says. "I'm so thankful to have had a chance to study in Adventist schools and learn the way to God."

Today May is a tutor, helping other children master their lessons and grow both spiritually and mentally. "I'm thankful for the opportunity I had to study at Yangon Adventist School," she adds. "I thank everyone around the world who gave to the Thirteenth Sabbath Offering to help enlarge the school so it can accommodate more students?"

Your offerings to mission do make a difference, a real difference in the lives of children and adults around the world. Thank you.

MAY teaches school in Yangon, Myanmar.