

Recovering the Heart of the Great Commission – Matthew 28:16-20

When we consider the **heart** of *something* I believe we are looking for what **makes** that thing *work* – what **keeps** it *alive* – what **makes** it what it is. *In other words*, we are looking for what it is that – *if removed* – would **cause** that thing to *cease* to **exist** or *cease* to **function** the way it *should*.

Cassava, yams, or plantains form the **heart** of *fufu*. Maize forms the **heart** of what in South Africa is called *mealie meal* and in East Africa, *ugali*. Since I don't want to begin a *cultural war* – let me not mention *jollof rice*!

The Heart of the Matter: What *then* is it that – *if removed* – would cause *biblical* **discipleship** to *cease* to **exist** or *cease* to **function** the way it *should*? I emphasise *biblical* because *every family* and *every community* **knows** *how* to **disciple** – *even if* they do not *use* the term. *Every family* and *every community* **knows** *how* to **impress** their *cultural* foundations **upon** the next generation. The *very fact* that cultures **exist** *proves* this.

What *then* is it that *if removed* from the **Matthew 28:16-20 Great Commission** – would cause *biblical* **discipleship** to *cease* to **exist** or *cease* to **function** the way it *should*?

The **answer** has been mentioned in *different* ways during **Day 1** and **Day 2** but allow me to **highlight** it from a *different* point of view. **Matthew 28:16-20** reads:

¹⁶ Then the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had told them to go. ¹⁷ When they saw him, they worshipped him; but some doubted. ¹⁸ Then Jesus came to them and said, 'All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. ¹⁹ Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰ and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.'

Now let me *remove* what I believe is the **heart** of the **Great Commission**:

¹⁶ Then _____ disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain where _____ had told them to go. ¹⁷ When they saw _____, they worshipped _____; but some doubted. ¹⁸ Then _____ came to them and said, 'All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to _____. ¹⁹ Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of _____ and of _____ and of _____, ²⁰ and teaching them to obey everything _____ commanded you. And surely _____ with you always, to the very end of the age.'

From **Day 1**, the *problem* with discipleship *today* has been **highlighted**. That many churches **function** today with their *church leaders* or on their *denominations* **placed** in these blank spaces. *Allow to me illustrate this:*

¹⁶ Then **our** disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain where **we** had told them to go. ¹⁷ When they saw **us**, they worshipped **us**; but some doubted. ¹⁸ Then **we** came to them and said, 'All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to **us**. ¹⁹ Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of **our church** and of **our traditions** and of **our preferences**, ²⁰ and teaching them to obey everything **we** have commanded you. And surely **we are** with you [**as long as you follow us**].'

So we can **see** that these blank spaces *can* be **filled** with someone/something *other than* **Christ**. *Meaning* that it is *very possible* to **make** disciples – *very possible* to worship and fellowship – *very possible* to do outreach *even when* **Christ** has been removed. And that is *why* the **discipleship** *problem* exists. *Because*, without Christ, the kind of disciples **made** – *the kind of* worship and fellowship that **takes place** – and *the kind of* outreach that **is done** will not be *biblical* – none of these will be **centred** on the *biblical* Great Commission – *because* the *biblical* Great

Commission is **centred on Christ**. The Apostle Paul *warned* the Colossian Church what **happens** when Christ has been *removed*:

Colossians 2:16-19 New International Version - UK

¹⁶ Therefore do not let anyone judge you by what you eat or drink, or with regard to a religious festival, a New Moon celebration or a Sabbath day. ¹⁷ These are a shadow of the things that were to come; the reality, however, is found in Christ. ¹⁸ Do not let anyone who delights in false humility and the worship of angels disqualify you. Such a person also goes into great detail about what they have seen; they are puffed up with idle notions by their unspiritual mind. ¹⁹ They have lost connection with the head, from whom the whole body, supported and held together by its ligaments and sinews, grows as God causes it to grow.

Jesus gave a **stronger warning** to his disciples in **John 15:1-8** New International Version – UK:

¹ 'I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. ² He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful. ³ You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you. ⁴ Remain in me, as I also remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me.

⁵ 'I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing. ⁶ If you do not remain in me, you are like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned. ⁷ If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. ⁸ This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, **showing yourselves to be my disciples.**

Let us *then* put the **heart** *back in* **Matthew 28:16-20**:

¹⁶ Then the **eleven disciples** went to Galilee, to the mountain where **Jesus** had told them to go. ¹⁷ When they saw **him**, they worshipped **him**; but some doubted. ¹⁸ Then **Jesus** came to them and said, 'All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to **me**. ¹⁹ Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of **the Father** and of **the Son** and of **the Holy Spirit**, ²⁰ and teaching them to obey everything **I** have commanded you. And surely **I am** with you always, to the very end of the age.'

The *biblical* Great Commission is **centred on Christ** – on **who** he **is** – on **what** he **taught** and on **where** he **is**. On **who** he **is** – **Jesus** – **Yeshua** – **Yahweh** our **Saviour**. He is the Lord **worthy** of our worship – **worthy** of our

obedience to his **commands** – *including* the **command** of the Great Commission. On **what** he **taught** – that we should **obey** the Father's **commands** *as evidence* of our **love** for God – *in the same way* that **Jesus** himself did. On **where** he **is** – *right here with us* – through the **Holy Spirit**. We were *well* **reminded** of this yesterday.

Christ Jesus is *the kind of* **image of God** that we are *supposed to* **be**. This is *why* it is *critically* **important** for disciples to become *like* **Christ** – not *like anyone else!*

John 14:23-31 summarises *quite well* – who **Jesus is** – what **Jesus taught** and where **Jesus is**:

²³ Jesus replied, 'Anyone who loves me will obey my teaching. My Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them. ²⁴ Anyone who does not love me will not obey my teaching. These words you hear are not my own; they belong to the Father who sent me.

²⁵ 'All this I have spoken while still with you. ²⁶ But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you. ²⁷ Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be

troubled and do not be afraid. ²⁸ 'You heard me say, "I am going away and I am coming back to you." If you loved me, you would be glad that I am going to the Father, for the Father is greater than I. ²⁹ I have told you now before it happens, so that when it does happen you will believe. ³⁰ I will not say much more to you, for the prince of this world is coming. He has no hold over me, ³¹ but he comes so that the world may learn that I love the Father and do exactly what my Father has commanded me.

In **Revelation 2**, **Jesus** gave this *hope* to churches that have *fallen short* of his **commands** –

⁴ Yet I hold this against you: you have forsaken the love you had at first. ⁵ Consider how far you have fallen! Repent and do the things you did at first. If you do not repent, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place.

⁷ Whoever has ears, let them hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To the one who is victorious, I will give the right to eat from the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God.

May we repent – and **return** the *focus* of our **discipleship** to the **heart** of the Great Commission – **Christ Jesus!**