



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

Matthew 28:16-28

"An Unlimited Scepter, A Boundless Commission and Emmanuel" TRANSCRIPT

[Message] Well let me say it's a pleasure to be here and a pleasure to be breathing [Laughter] after my last experience with you. It's not often that have the opportunity to speak to so many women, ladies, young and old. And I guess I was just overcome by the experience last time. I'm hoping that this time I will survive. I am sitting down not because I'm weak, you understand, but that was my position for about thirty years in theological seminary. I usually sat behind a desk like this. Since this is for truth I renounce that statement. Actually I'm sitting down because I'm wondering what will happen if I stand up. [Laughter] But anyway I'm starting sitting down, and I'm looking forward to spending a little time with you over a passage in God's word.

I'd like for you to turn to Matthew chapter 28, and I want to say a few words concerning the conclusion of the gospel, verses 16-28, Matthew 28, verse 16-20

"Then the eleven disciples went away into Galilee, into a mountain where Jesus had appointed them. And when they saw him, they worshipped him: but some doubted. And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. Go ye therefore, and

teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit:
Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you
always, even unto the end of the world. Amen."

What I would like to say to you this morning I have entitled "An Unlimited Scepter, A
Boundless Commission and Emmanuel." You, I'm sure, being students of the Bible know that
Emmanuel is a Hebrew expression, the proposition emmanu is with us, and el of course is God;
with us is God. So "An Unlimited Scepter, A Boundless Commission and God with Us."
Matthew 28 verse 16 through verse 20.

The gospel of the king which is a common title for the gospel of Matthew; the gospel of
the king has reached its natural consummation in chapter 28. The king has been raised to
rulership of the universe. The nation and the nations have repulsed him. But a little flock has
been gathered, and this little flock has been gathered to be his heroes. To support them he will
cast around their loneliness and feebleness the armor of his perpetual undying presence. This
concluding paragraph has been best known by its title, the great commission. It's not the great
commission, you understand, because the great one is the one that our Lord himself had. You can
find a reference to that in Galatians chapter 4 in verse 4 and verse 5. If I can find it here I'll read
it for you, Galatians 4, verse 4 and 5, where the apostle writes, I did say Galatians not Ephesians.
"But when the fullness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made
under the law, to redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of
sons." That, of course, is the Great Commission. This, however, is a great commission and we'll
still call it by that. The important thing is that what our Lord says is that we have a charge to
complete, and therefore we who acknowledge the Lord Jesus Christ as the Son of God and our
Savior, we are responsible to respond, to go into all the world and preach the gospel, the Great
Commission.

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It's fitting in a sense that the last glimpse of our Lord is from a mountain top. The gospel began in the valley with the story of his birth. Always if you carefully examine the text you will find that there are indications of what is to follow in almost everything that our Lord did. And so while we say that the gospel began in the valley with the glory of his birth, there were gleams of his deity in the account of his birth ending ultimately on the highest summit and a short flight from there to the royal throne which our Lord sits upon at the present time.

I've been thinking about this passage long before I was supposed to speak to you, because it seems to me it bears particular reference to the situation in which we are living in at the present moment. If you are a person who follows the history of the United States and the history of the nations and our place in it at the present time, the thing that disturbs me, being a human being and not knowing what's going to happen, the thing that disturbs me is the rise of Islam, Islam and the world. And I don't mean to attack Islam as a religion, but it's not Christianity. Therefore it's very disturbing to me. And so when I read a passage that has to do with the unlimited scepter, the unlimited rule of our Lord Jesus Christ that raises questions in my mind. And I must confess that I am a bit troubled by our situation today.

This is the Great Commission. It is fitting, of course, that our last glimpse of our Lord in this gospel should be from a mountain top. The gospel began in the valley with the story of his birth, there were gleams of the ultimate glory in the account of his birth, but nevertheless this is the ending. And it ends on the highest summit, a short flight to the royal throne. There's no reason to doubt the historicity of this event so far as biblical scholarship is concerned. This was probably some well known spot near the Sea of Galilee where great things had been uttered by our Lord from time to time. The precept of chapters 5, 6, and 7 and the sermon that our Lord delivered there, the prophetic words that he uttered in chapters 24 and 25, and this proclamation that he utters in chapter 28 are all from that mountain, which suggests at least the significance of it in the mind of the triune God. So here was at some well known spot that is well known to him

near the Sea of Galilee. And from him comes precept, prophecy, and the ultimate proclamation all from this mountain.

In verse 17 the evangelist writes, "When they saw him, they worshipped him, but some doubted." When I put a title to this particular section I entitle it, "The Frustration and Dubitation of the Disciples." But looking around on the audience, it's obvious that most of us, including me, if this was the first time that I had heard the word dubitation I might be wondering what in the world does that mean. We don't really use that word very often. One of the great advantages as far as guessing what the word means is eight years of Latin, which I had. So if you've had that, then you have an inkling of what it means. The frustration and dubitation, that archaic word is a word that means doubt. So the frustration and doubt of the disciples in verse 17. And Matthew writes, "When they saw him, they worshipped him, but some doubted." That's not surprising is it? Almost everything that we read of in the word of God has been doubted by someone. And almost every place in the Bible we have doubted about the things that are in the Bible. It's part of what Adam has left from his fall in the Garden of Eden. At any rate there we have the frustration and the doubt of the disciples, some doubted.

And in verse 18 through verse 20 there is the great universal commission. "And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth." The new relationship suggested by their going to Galilee previously without him, his coming to them suggests some things that are to come. And we have a triplet of sayings here with a fullness of meaning that guarantees genuineness. John says, or rather John repeats where it's concerning our Lord Jesus Christ, "Never man spake like this man." It's certainly true.

Now, let's notice verse 18 where the evangelist writes about the prerogative of the Lord Jesus. "And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, "All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth." Witness follows worship; a simple statement, majestic and inexhaustible in its claim of unrestricted universal sovereignty. "All authority has been given unto me in heaven and in

earth." Unlimited universal sovereignty is the possession of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. We don't worship a limited Son of God. He has his hands upon everything, and always. And when things happen that we find difficult to understand it's helpful to remember that they come still from the authoritative hands of the Son of God. The triune God controlling all of the affairs upon this earth.

Human thought loses itself in trying to comprehend that, of course. But this statement in verse 18, "All authority is given unto me in heaven and in earth." Unrestricted universal sovereignty. Human thought loses itself in trying to comprehend it. In other passages that one could turn to, to buttress what is said here in different ways; the Apostle Paul's statement in Colossians 1, verse 16 and verse 17, what is said in Revelation 2:27. The closes parallel is probably Matthew chapter 11, and verse 27. This is one of my favorite passages, not because I understand it so perfectly, but because it merits constant study, even after one has managed to gain some understanding of what it means, there is a lot more there we are sure. Look at what he says, "All things have been delivered to my by my Father, and no one knows the Son except the Father." Isn't that interesting? "No one knows the Son except the Father, nor does anyone know the Father except the Son, and the one to whom the Son wills to reveal him." The sovereign authority of the Son of God to reveal the Father to us, what a magnificent power that is, and what a magnificent person to hold that power concerning the knowledge of God. That's something for us to think about. In fact, you could close the class right here and we would have a great lesson for today to think about, all of us, because it's one of those things that we never gain complete knowledge of, unrestricted universal sovereignty.

Now the precepts of our Lord are given in verse 19 and 20. In verse 19 we read, "Go ye therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the age." Notice the therefore, "Go

therefore." An ecumenical commission supported by ecumenical authority, "Go therefore, teach."

The Greek term here is a term that means to make disciples. So to disciple, make a learner. It's a little bit more than salvation, although it includes salvation. To be a disciple is a person not only who has eternal life, but he has become in measure a follow also of our Lord. So this is what he has said. You notice the message is to go outside the national bonds, too, not simply of Jewish people, but of all nations. So here we have what is later in the remainder of the gospel and also in the remainder of the New Testament, "Baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit." So unrestricted, majestic, inexhaustible sovereignty. Human thought kind of loses itself trying to analyze all that that means. The precepts of our Lord in verses 19 and 20 are "Therefore." "Go therefore and make disciples of the nations, teaching them, and also reminding them of the promise that he is with us." Teaching them; the word, teach, is a word that means to make a disciple. It doesn't mean what you really think about when you think about you ought to go to school. You ought to go to theological seminary. To go to theological seminary is very valuable, but that doesn't make one necessarily a disciple of our Lord. There's more than simply knowledge in the mind when we speak about a disciple of our Lord Jesus Christ. He is a follower, but a follower with knowledge. To be a disciple is extremely significant, and something that should be the aim of all of us, to be a disciple. And this ecumenical commission, supported by ecumenical authority is the ground of all of us coming to the knowledge of the Son of God. To teach is to make a disciple or a learner.

I have in my notes more than salvation, well yes it is. It includes salvation, but it's more than simply the possession of eternal life. To be a learner, to be a follower, a disciple, is one who has begun to take steps along the way in the knowledge which he possesses. In other words, he's begun to carry out some of that which flows naturally from the light that God has given to him. To be a disciple is then a person who has begun to live the Christian life, which has been given to

him by sovereign grace, something he hasn't earned. But it is something that he is to live out, that which God has done for him.

The precepts of our Lord are set forth for us in verse 19 and verse 20. "Go therefore, make disciples, baptizing them in the name of the Father." And he says, notice I'm puzzling a little bit; I'm not using my glasses. I look so much better without my glasses. [Laughter] Actually, I usually don't use my glasses in public, never have. But I hate to admit it that's it getting to me. I'm afraid I'm going to have to start using them. And it really is depressing to think about. I'm sharing my heart with you today. [Laughter]

Verse 18 and 19, the precepts of our Lord; those precepts are threefold. We are to go to the world, not come to church but to go to the world. Although, people that are in the church are fit subjects for the gospel often. Baptizing, that of course is for discipleship, not salvation, baptizing. Adolph Weissman, one of the greatest of the Greek New Testament scholars pointed out in one of his discussions of this term that to baptize means to become the property of, so that when a person is baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus that of course should be a recognition. And the beginning of the recognition is the fact that he has become a disciple of our Lord. He's become the property of him. So we read here that we are to go and make disciples, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

Now, this baptizing is for discipleship, not salvation. Then he says, "Teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded them." Now, this is a marvelous promise. In fact Levertoff one of the students of this gospel says that this is the "greatest conclusion to a written work ever given." Baptizing them, "teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you and lo I am with you always." Now let me just stop for a moment over this. "Lo I am with you," not shall be, "am" with you. I am with you. He is our companion. He is our ally in all of the experiences of life. If you are a believer, if you're one of his disciples, this is a promise for you. I am with you, not as I say shall be.

I have a comment from Helmet Teleka, I'm not sure I can find it immediately, but it has to do with the fact that our Lord has remained at base headquarters, but nevertheless we are his disciples in the present world. "Lo I am with you always." This expression means always in the sense of all of the days throughout. That is all of the days and all of the days. So all of the days and all of the time within the day, all of the days and all twenty-four hours, "Lo I am with you always." In a sense this is probably the secret of the church's staying power. In a sense the fact that our Lord is with us always in all of the experiences of life, and the fact that that this becomes usually the knowledge of all genuine Christians, that this is true. He is with us and always with us in the experiences of life, always, all the days throughout, until the end of the age, no limits to this glorious promise timewise. It's not from now until tomorrow, that is Wednesday doesn't end everything. In fact, Wednesday doesn't end anything as far as we are concerned. We so often talk about days when we ought to be talking about something else. And I'm going to take a sip of water if you don't mind. It's the water of life. [Laughter] "Lo I am with you always to the end of the age." And we are still in the age. This promise is one that is an effective and applicable promise for us today, to the end of the age, no limits.

Well, the question that a person asks after all of this of course is, is this all valid today? You notice there's no vagueness in what is said. You cannot find vagueness here. As a matter of fact, it may be disappointing to some students of the Bible, and particularly in theological seminary, there are no real exegetical problems here at all. That's comforting. When you sit in an exegetical class and students are studying the Greek text and asking all kinds of questions, the professor leading the class frequently come to a place and say, "Now we have a problem here?" And then he'll discuss the exegetical problem, that is the result of the thinking of exegetes over the years concerning a particular passage. There are many of them.

In fact when you study in theological seminary that's one of the main things you do, is you learn to pick out the problems and discuss the problems. Sometimes in the rush to find the

problems and to pick them out and to deal with them, we may even forget the major thrust of the passage itself. That's possible too you know. So there are no limits to this wonderful promise. "I am with you always to the end of the age." No problems, no exegetical problems, no reason for the professor of New Testament to start a long discussion on some intricate point. It's very simple, very plain, very clear. "I am with you to the end of the age." That is a marvelous promise. The older we get the more marvelous it becomes day by day. Now I can't tell you how it is, because you're not as old as I am. But when you get to be as old as I am it's a much more wonderful promise than it seemed to be fifty years ago.

Now, a question, is all of this valid; this marvelous promise, these marvelous statements by our Lord. You'll notice there's no vagueness here. These are, most of them, words that are very easy to understand when they stand by themselves. They are simple. There's not some unusual word that hasn't been used by some other Greek scholar somewhere else and perhaps overlooked. It's all plain and clear, no vagueness. As a matter of fact there are no exegetical problems here. And problems are the things upon which professors thrive, because that keeps them doing what they're doing. You don't need a professor if you don't have any problems. [Laughter] At any rate, that's the way it is, it's all valid. It's very simple and the key is the text says Emmanuel, God with us.

I don't know whether I have time to say something or not. I'm so unused to teaching in public now. I don't know it's probably not worth finding. What I want to say is something that has to do with what's happening in our society today. In our society today Christians, we Christians are, I'm sure, very much disturbed by the apparent rise in prominence of Islam today. Maybe that hasn't troubled some of you, but it has made me do a lot of thinking. In fact, I've even bought some books on Islam and read some things in them and still am for that matter. Because it is a problem for Christianity to think about, particularly if you want to go out on the mission field. So I have been thinking a good deal about that, Islam. And I think about Islam in the light of

these marvelous promises that the Lord Jesus has uttered. "I am the light of the world" and all of the others. "I am with you." Those are great promises. And I must say, as far as I am concerned, I have rested my life upon them and intend to rest my life upon them.

When I left the insurance business that my father had left to me in order to go to theological seminary, the things upon which I had been planning my life I left behind. I left the business, which would be mine in a few more years. And I left a lot of friends behind too. Fortunately a number of them had become Christians too. The question of the validity of Christianity is fundamental to an individual's life and particularly the men. I say that men, I probably have said something I shouldn't say here. But I'm thinking of the men who are in the business world and who are responsible for a living for their family that's especially significant for them. Is Christianity really a truth? Is the Lord Jesus Christ truly the Lord of this world of which we're a part?

Some of the greatest of the missionaries have gone out into the world and have come back in order to convince the people who sent them out that the Lord Jesus Christ is real and has undertaken for them. Today in the newspapers we read about Al Qaeda. We read about the Taliban. We know that they are vital, as far as life is concerned. They are powerful foes of Christianity, and we are Christians. How sure is the foundation upon which we stand? And when we think of the foundation upon which we stand, we stand upon the authority of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ ultimately. We stand upon him and his inviolable word and promises.

When I studied at the University of Edinburgh and the University of Basel, but particularly at the University of Edinburgh I had an opportunity to go over to Glasgow University and attend some classes. I also attended some meetings in some of the churches which had historic significance for Christianity. One of them Glasgow University was a place well known by all of the students of the University of Edinburgh, and the name that was still well known was the name of David Livingstone. David Livingstone had been a missionary to Africa and had gone

out from that part of the world. Glasgow University had conferred upon him the degree of Doctor or Laws. And in 1856 he rose to speak, having received the degree, and was received in respectful silence. He was gaunt and haggard as a result of his hardships in tropical Africa. His left arm had been crushed by a lion. I didn't pronounce that right; I'm a Southerner I know, lion. It was hanging helplessly at his side. He announced his resolve to return to Africa without misgiving, with great gladness and he added, "Would you like to tell me what supported me through the years of exile among a people whose language I could not understand and whose attitude toward me was always uncertain and often hostile? It was this, 'Lo I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. On these words," David Livingston said, "I stake everything. And they never failed."

What did he have? He had the companionship of the Son of God. That above all else is what you look for, long for, and God's wonderful grace we hope to know fully what that means, all of us, do we not, to know that. The companionship of the Son of God, this remarkable promise of our Lord Jesus Christ, 'Lo I am with you always." That effectively cancels all fear of Al Qaeda for Christians. I listen to the news every day, and I hear the struggles that go on in the world, but the greatest thing at the present time for me is the sense of relationship to the Lord Jesus Christ and let the newsmen on the radio, on the newspapers tell us about how bad things are, and they are bad there's no doubt about that, but my trust, my comfort, the secret of staying power is "Lo I am with you always even unto the end of the age."

The story of the Bible, the story of the New Testament particularly, is that the Lord Jesus has come as the sovereign redeeming Savior and he has resumed his work after his resurrection and is carrying out today. At this very moment he's carrying it out. That is my hope. You can have Harry Potter. As far as I'm concerned I have the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ. I think that's all I should say to you. I think I've gone way over my time. I wasn't counting or looking at my

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watch. That's a failing all preachers have. It's a pleasure to be with you. Let me close in a word of prayer.

[Prayer] Father, we are grateful indeed for the blessings of life through the Lord Jesus Christ. We thank Thee for these great promises. And we know, Lord, they are not simply words. They rest upon the person and work of the great Savior.

[RECORDING ENDS ABRUPTLY]