

Series: Seek

Title: Great Commission

Text: Luke 19:10

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Our study of the word “seek” in Scripture brings us to the subject of gospel witnessing. In Matthew 28:19, Jesus told His disciples, “Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.” According to Jesus, His followers have a responsibility to share His message with the entire world for the purpose of making more followers of Him. The passage above is famously called “the Great Commission.” It is an accompaniment to the Great Commandment (Matthew 22:37-40), the passage we talked about in our previous study. Coupled together, Jesus’ two “Great” teaching reveal that the people of God are made to relate to God (“Great Commandment”) and reflect God (“Great Commission”) to others.

The responsibility of Jesus’ people in this regard flows from the mission of Jesus. While He was on Earth, our Lord said, “For the Son of Man has come to seek and to save the lost” (Luke 19:10). Jesus’ words ultimately referred to His sacrificial and substitutionary life and death on behalf of sin. However, it is important to consider Jesus’ words in light of the overall scope of redemption. Since the beginning of time, God has had a plan to redeem a people for Himself (Revelation 13:8). He announced His plan in the Garden of Eden (Genesis 3:15) and He raised up a nation to provide a Deliverer for humanity (Genesis 12:1-3). Jesus was the fulfillment of all of God’s promises. He lived, died, and was raised so that God’s people could be delivered from sin and all of its consequences. Now God calls His people to join Him in His program of redemption.

Christians must be aware of such things if they want to truly seek after the kingdom of God. Each has a part to play in His mission to reconcile souls to Him. Jesus’ mission, as stated in Luke 19:10, should be the mission of every believer. Each should find great joy in telling other people about Jesus. Matthew Henry once professed, “I would think it a greater happiness to gain one soul to Christ, than mountains of gold and silver to myself.”¹ Let’s consider Jesus’ words in Luke 19:10 and learn more about what’s involved in living a life that is committed to the Great Commission.

“SON OF MAN”

To start our study concerning the pursuit of God and the Great Commission, it is important to consider the title Jesus used of Himself in Luke 19:10. He called Himself “The Son of Man.” When we study the New Testament, we find that our Lord applied several different titles to Himself — “Son” (Matthew 28:19), “Lord” (Matthew 7:21-22), “Teacher” (John 13:14), “I Am” (John 8:58), and more. Why did Jesus use “The Son of Man” in the context of His words in Luke 19:10? Apparently the title had a special relationship to His work in seeking and saving the lost.

According to one Bible scholar, the title “Son of Man” was a Hebrew or Aramaic expression that served as a sort of synonym for “humankind.”² In the Old Testament, the Lord applied the term to the prophet Ezekiel, saying, “Son of man, stand up on your feet and I will speak with you” (Ezekiel 2:1). Used in this way, the title emphasized the humanity of a person. Ezekiel was a mortal mouthpiece who was called to declare the Word of God to a rebellious people.

¹ Franks, E. Benjamin. *Departure Or Development? The Theology of Pastoral Care in The Reformation* (2). *The Banner of Truth Magazine*: 674. (Edinburgh, UK: The Banner of Truth Trust, 2019), 24.

² McKim, 264.

Fully Man

Theologians have often emphasized how the title “Son of Man” points to Jesus’ humanity. Such doctrine underscores what has often been called “the Hypostatic Union.” The word “hypostasis” speaks of “substance;” thus, the Hypostatic Union is a way of thinking about the substance of Christ. When Jesus came to Earth, He assumed humanity. Though He was fully God, He embraced full humanity (Philippians 2:7). He was and is one person, but He has two natures. His two natures exist without mixing or bleeding over into one another.

Such realities are important to the message of Christ. The gospel declares that the God-Man lived, died, and was raised for the sins of God’s people (1 Corinthians 15:3-4). If Jesus hadn’t embraced humanity, He couldn’t have offered a fitting sacrifice for sins. Adam’s first transgression required redemption by another human (Romans 5:12-14). This is why Jesus became the “Son of Man” — to live and die for humans in bondage to sin.

In the early years of the church, some struggled to embrace these realities. Because ancient thinking often saw physical material as being inherently evil, many were offended by the thought that Jesus could have had a real physical body. In time, a heresy arose known as the Arian controversy. Its leader — one named Arius — contended that Jesus was not fully human. The church renounced such teaching at the Council of Nicaea in 325 AD. Why? The church realized that the humanity of Jesus is integral to Christian salvation.

The apostle Paul announced Jesus’ humanity in his writings. In Galatians 4:4, He said, “When the time came to completion, God sent his Son, *born of a woman*, born under the law, to redeem those under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons” (Galatians 4:4-5). Take note of Paul’s reference to Jesus being “born of a woman.” We all know that Jesus was conceived by the Holy Spirit through an event known as the Virgin Birth (Isaiah 7:14; Luke 1:31-35). Why did Paul place emphasis on Jesus’ mother? In the ancient world, referring to a man by the maternal side of his family was considered an insult or a slight (Mark 6:3). Men were customarily called by their father’s name with the postfix “son of” being added to their name.

Paul placed weight on Jesus’ mother in order to place weight on Jesus’ humanity. He was interested in an event theologians call “the incarnation.” Contained within the theological term, is a Latin word for “flesh.” Simply put, the incarnation is the event through which the Divine Christ assumed human flesh. Though Jesus was conceived of the Holy Spirit (Divinity), he was born to a real, human mother (Humanity). Apart from such a birth, there would be no salvation for God’s people. One has said, “The purpose of the incarnation was to facilitate redemption. For the Son to redeem us, he had to become one of us. No incarnation, no redemption. But the good news is incarnation, and therefore redemption.”³

Fully God

In addition to highlighting Jesus’ humanity, the title “Son of Man” also highlighted His divinity. Some overlook this reality. It’s easy to understand why. After all, the title has the word “man” in it. An examination of Scripture, however, reveals that Jews regarded the title “Son of Man” as having divine implications. The label was famously used of the Lord Himself in the book of Daniel. While in captivity in Babylon, the prophet foretold of God’s judgment at the end of the world:

I continued watching in the night visions, and suddenly one *like a son of man* was coming with the clouds of heaven. He approached the Ancient of Days and was escorted before him. He was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, so that those of every people, nation, and language should serve him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that will not pass away, and his kingdom is one that will not be destroyed (Daniel 7:13-14).

³ Peterson, Robert A. *Salvation Accomplished by the Son: The Work of Christ*. (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 33.

The Divine implications associated with “Son of Man” tell us a lot about Jesus’ ministry and mission on Earth. He was zealous to seek and save the lost because of His awareness of the judgment that awaits sinners at the end of the world. It was His mission to redeem a people for God’s glory.

Proclaiming the God-Man

In our pursuit of God, it is important keep a clear view of Jesus’ nature as “the Son of Man.” This is the message we have been called to proclaim — Jesus is the God-Man who provides salvation from sin and all of its consequences. Because He was fully man, He was able to serve as a substitute for mere men and women like us. Because He was fully God, He was able to remain sinless and offer an effectual sacrifice. Such things are integral to faithfulness in the work of the Great Commission. As we join Jesus in proclaiming His salvation to the lost, may we retain a pure vision of who He is — “The Son of Man!”

SEEK

In speaking about His mission in life, Jesus said, “For the Son of Man has come to seek and to save the lost” (Luke 19:10). Pay attention to Jesus’ use of the word “seek.” The Greek term is at the heart of our study. As we have previously seen, the word was used in passages like Matthew 6:33, John 8:50, and 1 Corinthians 10:24. Jesus used the word in Luke 19:10 context of the work He did on behalf of God’s people.

A Seeking Sinner and A Seeking Savior

Our Lord’s words in Luke 19:10 were uttered within the context of an encounter with a man named Zacchaeus. The man had heard reports about the Lord’s powerful teachings and miraculous deeds. He greatly desired to see Jesus personally (Luke 19:3). Though he was rich, he undoubtedly had soul needs that made him seek after Jesus. As he made his way to meet our Lord, he was met by large crowds pressing in pandemonium. Unable to see Jesus because of the throngs of people, Zacchaeus climbed into a tree to observe from a distance.

Though the man had exerted effort into seeing Jesus, it was ultimately the Lord who sought Him out. Jesus called out to the man, “Zacchaeus, hurry and come down because today it is necessary for me to stay at your house” (Luke 19:5). The rich man responded to Jesus’ summons. The Bible says he did so “quickly” and “joyfully” (Luke 19:6). He exhibited true faith in Jesus, faith validated by the evidence of a changed life (Matthew 7:17; Ephesians 2:10; James 2:26). Aware of his sin and his need for salvation, the man offered to payback money he had made through his greedy, tax-collecting enterprises. His response was not an attempt to earn salvation; rather, his response gave evidence of his salvation. There was an external change to the way he lived because of an internal change he experienced from the call of Jesus (2 Corinthians 5:17).

Some onlookers immediately found fault with Jesus’ association with Zacchaeus. The man was a tax collector; consequently, he was regarded as a chief of sinners. As a part of his profession, he collected money from God’s people and diverted it to occupying pagan forces. What’s more, tax collectors were known for skimming off the top of their collections. In the eyes of most Jews, Zacchaeus was an idolatrous compromiser who had betrayed the people of God and enriched himself off of unjust taxes. It’s no wonder bystanders complained, saying, “He’s gone to stay with a sinful man” (Luke 19:7).

Jesus defended His association with the man by saying, “The Son of Man has come to seek and to save the lost.” Though the events of the day made it appear that Zacchaeus was the one who primarily sought the Lord, Jesus clarified matters. The man would have never demonstrated saving faith if the Lord hadn’t noticed the man and called him to repentance. Yes, the tax collector climbed a tree to see Jesus, but it was the Lord who said, “Zacchaeus, hurry and come down because today it is necessary for me to stay at your house” (Luke 19:5).

“No One Can Come to Me”

Jesus' interaction with Zacchaeus brings us to an important point regarding the work of the Great Commission. In all of our interactions with others, we are to exhibit a trust in the Lord's power to draw people to salvation. Jesus once said, "No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him, and I will raise him up on the last day" (John 6:44). Ultimately, Zacchaeus was saved because Jesus called him. Theologians and Bible teachers debate concerning the degree to which God's drawing plays a part in the salvation of human souls; however, most all agree that it is indeed necessary to some degree.

These things are important in the work of telling others about Jesus. We must always remember that we are responsible for sharing the gospel, but we must remain reliant on God to do the work of drawing and saving. It is our job to share, but it is His job to save. I once had a mentor in the faith tell me, "Patrick, share the gospel in the power of the Holy Spirit and leave the results to God." I believe such advice is helpful. When believers realize it is not their responsibility to save souls, they are freed to share the gospel in a more natural, calm, and pressure-free fashion.

SAVE

The term "saved" is regarded unfavorably by some today. Because Bible-believing Christians have long used it as a label for the experience of Christian salvation, some unbelievers mock this term. Even amongst professing believers, alternative terms have been proposed for describing Christian conversion. Some prefer to speak of "following Christ," "committing one's life to Christ," "giving one's heart to Jesus," or "inviting Jesus into one's life." While there are certainly different ways to speak of Christian conversion, the term "saved" is a Biblical one that portrays important realities related to Christian salvation. Jesus revealed such to be true in Luke 19:10 by saying, "...the Son of Man has come to seek and to save the lost."

A Message of Salvation

It is worth recognizing that both Jesus and the early church used the concept of "saved" in reference to the Christian message. In Matthew's gospel, the term is associated with the Lord's announcement to Joseph concerning the birth of Jesus: "She will give birth to a son, and you are to name him Jesus, because *he will save his people* from their sins" (Matthew 1:21). Jesus Himself used the term when speaking of the preaching and teaching of the church. When He gave the Great Commission to His disciples after His resurrection, He said, "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation. Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned" (Mark 16:15-16).

Aware of Jesus' instruction, the early church used the word "saved" when proclaiming the gospel. When the apostles were beaten, imprisoned, and threatened because of their preaching, they responded to those who tried to silence them by saying, "There is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to people by which we must be saved" (Acts 4:12). When the repentant sinner inquired about how he might be delivered from pending doom, Paul and Silas said, "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved—you and your household" (Acts 16:31).

The Meaning of Salvation

As we can see, the word "saved" is apropos when speaking about the message of Christ. The term appears throughout the New Testament to describe what happens at Christian conversion. For the purpose of our study, it is important to consider why the term is used in reference to salvation. If we are going to seek to lead others to Christ as Jesus did, we must understand why the word "saved" is so important to the Christian message.

The Greek word rendered "saved" in the New Testament is one that was used in a variety of contexts in the ancient world. In some situations, it referred to deliverance from

natural dangers and affections. This word also spoke of rescue from physical danger and harm. Matthew used the term in Matthew 9:21 to speak of healing of physical sickness.⁴

When my children were young, my wife and I had an experience that greatly unnerved us. After a day of eating and shopping at our local shopping mall, we made our way for the exits. One of our children, who was a toddler at the time, raced in front of us. As other shoppers passed through the doors to the facility, he bolted outside. Nothing stood in between him and a street filled with traffic. I screamed his name and raced to grab him. Fortunately, I was able to snatch him up before he ran into the street!

In the first-century world, the term “saved” could have been used to describe the act I performed to save my son from danger. I delivered him from pending doom. Can you see why the word “saved” is used in reference to the Christian message? Because of Christ, believers are delivered from sin and all of its consequences. Original sin makes humanity guilty before a Holy God. Each deserves judgment, death, destruction, and eternal alienation from the Creator. However, Christ’s death, burial, and resurrection makes deliverance possible. The Bible says, “But God proves his own love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. How much more then, since we have now been justified by his blood, will we be *saved through him* from wrath” (Romans 5:8-9).

As we aim to be faithful to fulfill Christ’s Great Commission, it is important that we stay mindful of the concepts related to this term “saved.” Jesus used the word when speaking of His mission in life for a good reason. He came to Earth not just to build a following, to provide a moral example, or to teach beneficial principles for life. He lived and died because humanity is under the curse of sin. Apart from His work, each will experience eternal destruction for sin. We must proclaim these realities in our gospel witness in a loving way. Many nowadays are unfazed by Christian witnessing, because Christian witnessing often says little about the need for salvation. When people don’t know that they need to be saved from pending doom, they will be unlikely to see their need for Christ.

SINNERS (“LOST”)

To conclude our study concerning the role of the Great Commission in seeking God, it is important to consider the designation Jesus used for unbelievers in Luke 19:10. He called them “the lost.” Our Lord’s choice of words was intentional. He was careful and calculated in depicting the state of those who need saving.

Original Sin

The Greek word rendered “lost” in Luke 19:10 is one that was often used of something that was ruined or destroyed.⁵ When used in reference to people, the word meant “to perish,” “to die,” or “to lose one’s life.”⁶ Applied to people in a spiritual sense, the term depicted humanity’s natural estate apart from Christ. Because of Adam and Eve’s first sin (Genesis 3:1-7), humankind is spiritually lost and alienated from God.

Sin has brought a state of spiritual death to all. Because each has violated God’s laws for mankind, each is destined for judgment. Apart from a work of salvation, men and women deserve to perish because of their sin. The Bible says, “Therefore, just as sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, in this way death spread to all people, because all sinned” (Romans 5:12).

Jesus and Lostness

⁴ Friberg, Friberg, and Miller, 372.

⁵ Friberg, Timothy, Barbara Friberg, and Neva F. Miller. *Analytical Lexicon of the Greek New Testament*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2000), 69.

⁶ *Ibid*, 69.

Jesus used the Greek word rendered “lost” over and over again to speak of mankind’s helpless estate. When He sent His disciples out to preach, He instructed them to go to “the *lost* sheep of the house of Israel” (Matthew 15:24). In His own preaching, He told people, “No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all *perish* as well” (Luke 13:3). The Greek word for “perish” was the same one for “lost” in Luke 19:10.

Jesus also liked to use the term in His famous parables. He often did so in order to picturesquely portray the way His work of salvation would provide deliverance for spiritually lost people. In Luke 15:3-7, He told the story of a “lost” sheep to emphasize the Lord’s love for spiritually destitute people. In Luke 15:8-10 He told a similar story with a similar point, only He spoke of a “lost” coin instead of a lost sheep. In Luke 15:11-32, Jesus told a story that is now well-known. The parable of The Prodigal Son recounted the way a rebellious son squandered his inheritance from his father and for a season lived a godless life. When the son returned home and expressed sorrow over his sins, his father welcomed him. The son’s brother was irritated by the fanfare the repentant son received. The father justified his reception of his wayward child, saying, “Son...we had to celebrate and rejoice, because this brother of yours was dead and is alive again; he was *lost* and is found” (Matthew 15:31-32).

We see that the word “lost” is used consistently in the New Testament to speak of humanity’s condition apart from Christ. By default, each is sinful. One has said, “All mankind constantly in all ages, without fail in any one instance, run into moral evil. Man has a universal tendency to disregard God and to disobey his law.”⁷ Because of man’s propensity toward sin, each deserves eternal separation from God.

Sin and Salvation

What do all of these things have to do with seeking God and the Great Commission? A lot. Many are never drawn to Christ because they are not aware of their sin. One has accurately said, “So long as sin is unseen - Christ will be unsought. Those who are whole need not the physician – but those who are sick.”⁸ In order to faithfully proclaim Christ in a way that will result in the conversion of souls, we must make people aware of the principle of sin. We must tell them that they are lost.

Most everyone is aware that something is wrong with the human condition. Personal experience, world events, failure of public figures, and more make it obvious that humanity has a problem. The Bible provides the most accurate diagnosis of such things. Christianity contains the message that tells how all the worlds wrongs can be made right. In Christ, we have the perfect remedy for our lost condition. As a result, God’s people should be compelled to join Jesus in seeking out the lost and proclaiming the message of salvation.

Conclusion

In all of our talk about seeking God’s kingdom, it is imperative that we see the priority of the Great Commission in such things. Are we really seeking God if we aren’t seeking to lead other souls to Him? Witnessing and sharing the gospel are fundamental activities in the lives of those who are faithfully pursuing the Lord. As we close our discussion on this topic, I would like to share an encouragement Charles Spurgeon shared with his congregation nearly one-hundred and fifty years ago:

Dear friend, the will of God is that you should speak to that friend sitting near you about soul-matters. The will of God is that your unconverted servant should have your prayers and your instruction. God puts men in our way on purpose that we may do them good. I

⁷ Murray, H. Iain. *Jonathan Edwards: A New Biography*. (Edinburgh, UK: The Banner of Truth Trust, 2008), 429.

⁸ Mead, Matthew. *Spiritual Conviction from The Almost Christian* (1661). *The Banner of Truth Magazine*: 698. (Edinburgh, U.K: The Banner of Truth Trust, 2021), 23.

have no doubt whatever that many a Christian is made to go where he would not choose to go, and to associate with persons that he would not wish to associate with, on purpose that he may be the means of taking light into dark places, and of carrying life from God to dead souls.⁹

⁹ Spurgeon, C.H. *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit: Vol. 26, 1880*. (Pasadena, TX: Pilgrim Publications, 2005), 80.