

## **Engaging Culture is an Expression of Gospel Love**

Two weeks ago, Pastor Danny introduced the last segment of a sweeping vision for a healthy, biblical, local church. That last segment was “Creative Cultural and Civic Involvement”. Last week, Pastor Mike reminded us of the reason, power, and authority for sharing the gospel as sharing the gospel is behind and undergirds all creative cultural and civic involvement. This week I wanted examine “Creative Cultural Involvement”. I wanted to do this exploring how engaging or being involved in culture is an expression of Gospel love. We are going to do so by drawing on the implications and inferences from 2 “great” texts or concepts: the Great Commission and the Great Commandment.

### **I. Toward a Definition of Culture**

First off, I wanted to begin by recalling and restating Danny definition of culture from 2 weeks ago. It is somewhat difficult to define culture because culture is where we “live, move, and have our being”. It’s like a fish trying to define water. Our very definition of culture is being expressed in and through culture. Regardless of this difficulty, Danny defined culture as:

**The sum of attitudes, customs, and beliefs that distinguishes one group of people from another.**

You could also say that culture is what humans make of the natural world.

It comprises languages, habits, ideas, beliefs, customs, social organization, inherited artifacts, technical processes, and values.

Now, a very important element to culture is context. Context is the set of circumstances or facts that surround a particular event, situation, person, or idea. Culture is not created in a vacuum. One way to think of it is as relative brooks that flow from one stream of history.

**No matter how you define the term, ultimately culture is people and people are culture. Culture is the ideas of people as expressed in the world.** Now the “Great” concepts that Jesus spoke of are concerning people. Both the Great Commission and the Great Commandment warrant and mandate that we as a gospel or Christian community will be involved in people. So let’s take a look at the Great Commission and the Great Commandment.

### **II. The Great Commission**

The Great Commission is the charge of Jesus to His body the Church to be witnesses of His death and resurrection to all nations. Pastor Mike reviewed with us last week the Great Commission passages from each of the 4 Gospels. They are Matthew 28:18-20, Mark 16:15-16, Luke 24:45-53, and John 21:15-17. I wanted to focus on the Great Commission as recorded by Matthew:

**Matthew 28:18-20** And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. 19 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, 20 teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age."

In this passage, we find the crucified and resurrected Jesus appearing to his disciples before his ascension to heaven. In about 40 days-time, Jesus is helping this gospel community to understand the significance of his death and resurrection as it relates to everything he has taught them about the Old Testament and what it means going forward.

Now let's take a look at the flow of thought in this passage:

(Grounds) All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me  
(Command) Therefore as you go make disciples of all nations  
    (Specific 1) Baptizing them in the name of the Father/Son/Holy Spirit  
    (Specific 2) Teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you  
(Promise) Behold I am with you always, to the end of the age

We can summarize this by saying that **because Jesus has authority over the universe, we are commanded to make disciples of all nations and He promises to be with us till He returns.** Two very significant things to notice in this passage are geographic and textual. **Geographically**, Jesus and his disciples are on a mountain. A few verses before this Matthew records (Matthew 28:16), "Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them." This isn't the first we've seen Jesus on a mountain in Matthew. He also ventured to a mountain in the famous accounts of the "Sermon on the Mount" and "The Transfiguration":

**Matthew 5:1** Seeing the crowds, he went up on the mountain, and when he sat down, his disciples came to him.

**Matthew 17:1** And after six days Jesus took with him Peter and James, and John his brother, and led them up a high mountain by themselves.

What does that mean? Well, in the Old Testament, God appeared to Moses and the leaders of Israel on a mountain to give them the covenant at Sinai. It was there that they received the 10 commandments and the Law of Moses after they had been delivered by God in the Exodus from Egypt. Since Israel had broken that covenant and was judged by being taken captive into exile, God had promised a New Covenant that would forgive the sins of His people and write His law on their hearts. One way he said this in the prophecy to Isaiah was:

**Isaiah 2:1-5** The word that Isaiah the son of Amoz saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem. 2 It shall come to pass in the latter days that the mountain of the house of the LORD shall be established as the highest of the mountains, and shall be lifted up

above the hills; and **all the nations** shall flow to it, 3 and many peoples shall come, and say: "Come, let us go up to the **mountain** of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob, **that he may teach us his ways** and that we may walk in his paths." **For out of Zion shall go the law**, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem. 4 He shall judge between **the nations**, and shall decide disputes for many peoples; and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore. 5 O house of Jacob, come, let us walk in the light of the LORD.

God had been planning and promising a New Covenant with Israel that would include not just people from ethnic Israel (physical descendants of Abraham), but also people from every nation and culture under heaven. There were glimpses of this New Covenant in the "mountain" scenes in the Sermon on the Mount and the Transfiguration. But it was not until the Great Commission that Jesus had finally ratified the New Covenant through his death and resurrection. Finally, for the first time Jesus can send his disciples on the New Covenant conquest after the New Covenant exodus from slavery. In this Great Commission passage we have a fulfillment of Isaiah 2. Note the striking parallels these 2 passages have.

<b>Isaiah 2:1-5</b>	<b>Matthew 28:16-20</b>
<b>Mountain</b> of house of the Lord (v.2)	<b>Mountain</b> which Jesus directed (v.16)
Out of Zion shall <b>go</b> (v.2)	As you <b>go</b> (v.19)
<b>All nations</b> shall flow to it (v.2)	Make disciples of <b>all nations</b> (v.19)
He may <b>teach</b> us His ways (v.3)	<b>Teaching</b> them to observed what I commanded (v.20)

Now **Textually**, Jesus' words also echo the "Son of Man" passage found in Daniel 7:

**Daniel 7:13-14** I saw in the night visions, and behold, with the clouds of heaven there came one like a son of man, and he came to the Ancient of Days and was presented before him. 14 And **to him was given dominion** and glory and a kingdom, **that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him; his dominion is an everlasting dominion**, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom one that shall not be destroyed.

This passage was massively important to Jesus' own identity as he referred to Himself more by the title of "Son of Man" than any other title, name, or designation. As a matter of fact, in Matthew alone he uses this title of himself 30 times. Thus, it is fitting that he should use the words of this passage in some of His final words to his disciples. Notice the three main parallels.

<b>Daniel 7:13-14</b>	<b>Matthew 28:18-20</b>
To him was <b>given dominion</b> (v.14)	All <b>authority</b> on heaven and earth <b>has been given to me</b> (v.18)
That <b>all</b> peoples, <b>nations</b> , and languages shall serve him (v.14)	Make disciples of <b>all nations</b> (v.19)
His dominion is <b>everlasting</b> (v.14)	I am with you <b>always</b> (v.20)

That being said about the meaning of the Great Commission, let us observe a most obvious detail from the text: the New Covenant conquest or mission is to people. And not just people of one culture or our own culture, but people from every nation, tribe, and language. In other words, it is people from every people-group and culture. We are called to make disciples of people. This presupposes that they are not disciples and have different ideas and world views. If we are going to make disciples and teach, we have to engage and have some involvement with the language, ideas, philosophies, attitudes, habits, and customs of other people. Ultimately, it is because Jesus has authority over all cultures that the church must be involved in culture.

In transitioning to the Great Commandment, let us remember that it is summarized and embedded within the Great Commission: "teaching them to observe all that I have commanded".

### **III. The Great Commandment**

During Jesus' ministry, he was asked several times about what he thought the greatest commandments were from the Covenant to Israel, the Mosaic Covenant. His reply was always the same to this question:

**Matthew 22:37-40** "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. 38 This is the great and first commandment. 39 And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. 40 On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets."

However, Jesus has fulfilled the Covenant with Israel by taking on the curse of it through his death and resurrection. Therefore, Jesus has removed this covenant and established the New Covenant through his death and resurrection. In so doing, Jesus has transformed the Great Commandment to the New Commandment. He transforms it in passages like:

**John 13:34-35** A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. 35 By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."

**John 15:9** As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Abide in my love.

**John 15:12** This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you.

**1 John 3:23** And this is his commandment, that we believe in the name of his Son Jesus Christ and love one another, just as he has commanded us.

Loving others as Christ has loved us is the essence of the New Covenant that the church, the new people of God, lives in. Notice that in this transformation the Gospel is now informing and defining what love is. It is loving people with Gospel love. Now when we love people as we have been loved by Jesus through the gospel, we are expressing and extending the gospel to them. Now we look to the Gospel to teach us about loving people. Now we can draw from our own experience of God's love through the death and resurrection of Jesus to love other people. Since we have tasted the highest caliber of love, this is going to produce the highest caliber of love in us.

So we shall make another obvious observation. We are people, therefore we are in culture and are culture. We are called to love people with Gospel love. In order to love people with Gospel love, we need to be involved with people and engaged with people in order to express Gospel love. Since people are culture, Gospel love expresses itself in engagement and involvement in culture. It is simply unavoidable and is an implication of the Gospel in the New Covenant.

#### **IV. Engaging Culture is an Expression of Gospel Love**

The Gospel is the good news that through his death and resurrection, Jesus has been established as the ruler of the universe and he forgives all those who believe in him and love him. The Gospel necessarily involves people. And if it involves people, it necessarily involves culture. Since we are called in the Gospel to love and teach others about the most precious and beautiful and powerful person, Jesus, we are called to engage, to interact, to occupy, to correct, to enlighten, to question, to instruct, and to be involved in the cultures around us to demonstrate Gospel love.