

RT23 week 1: "TO THE ENDS OF THE EARTH" ¹

Well I'm absolutely thrilled to be able to kick off this year's RT series and fundraising campaign. As in previous years Arotahi have provided all the resources for this next 3 weeks, including preaching material and the wristbands that you were given as you came in this morning.

This is always an important season in the life of the church. We're always talking about Mission Local and Abroad. You see Gaylene Burgess, up here most weeks bringing an update on the Mission Partners we give regular support to. This next 3 weeks, focusses us specifically on NZBMS Mission partners and the work globally of *Arotahi*².

In fact, the wristbands you were given – who by the way were made by the staff at Joyya – a business that Arotahi have been a part of since it began – we wear to remind us to remember the work of our Mission partners and pray for them. The women who made these wristbands are our global whānau. We wear to remind us that our support does make a difference in the lives of people.

So the funds we raise across these 3 weeks goes to the continuing support of Baptist Global Mission work. That's the *objective*. But there's also something very *personal* too about this RT season. What's my place, your place in God's mission, in the world? My hope is that we'll be extra prayerful about this...

Let me summarise all that with these words: *1. Pray, 2. Give, 3. Ask.*

Before we get to *Week 1* a few additional introductory remarks. We, as Aotearoa New Zealand Baptists, have an amazing ancestral story. It is a privilege for us to be a part of it now, and a privileged responsibility to carry the story forward. So I want to once again re-invite you into that story.

NZBMS, that we now call *Arotahi* - carries the meaning of a focus in one direction, looking towards one horizon simultaneously, concentrating on one thing together...

Arotahi began in 1885. Just three years after the Baptist Union was formed and 34 years after the first Baptist church was opened (Nelson Baptist in 1851). When the small group of 12 ministers and 13 church delegates gathered in 1885, for the third Baptist Union annual meeting, they unanimously decided to enter global mission together. By establishing the New Zealand Baptist Missionary Society (NZBMS) with this purpose:

"The general object of the Society is to enable Churches of the Baptist Union of Churches in New Zealand to fulfill the "Great Commission" of the Lord Jesus Christ (Matthew 28:16-20) in those areas of the world to which He may direct.

¹ For all references see: [Dropbox – Week 1 – Simplify your life](#) (Nelson Baptist Church began in 1851; Barna research Report–'The Great Disconnect: Reclaiming the Heart of the Great Commission in Your Church' 2022:P25 (Barna Group).

² Find out more at [Arotahi - Arotahi - NZBMS - New Zealand Baptist Missionary Society](#).

There were only 25 Baptist churches, with around 2600 members in the country at that time. Each of the 25 churches were struggling to afford a pastor and the costs of building a church, as well as the extra needed to support a small Māori mission (Te Wairoa in the Rotorua region) and a mission on the West coast of the South Island, let alone, Mission Abroad. Yet in faith, they lifted their eyes to the needs of the world in line with Jesus' heart and commission.

(READ Matt. 28:16-20) Then the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had told them to go. When they saw him, they worshiped him; but some doubted. Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have *commanded* you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."

Throughout our 3 weeks in Renew Together, we will return to Jesus' Great Commission (Matthew 28:16-20), opening it again to hear the same message our ancestors heard and responded to – Jesus' call for us today, as churches and individuals. What does the "Go..." look like for us as a church...look like for you personally?

Across the 3 weeks we'll look at various themes drawn from Jesus GC for us...

1. * To the ends of the earth,
2. * Made in God's image, and
3. * Go with the grain

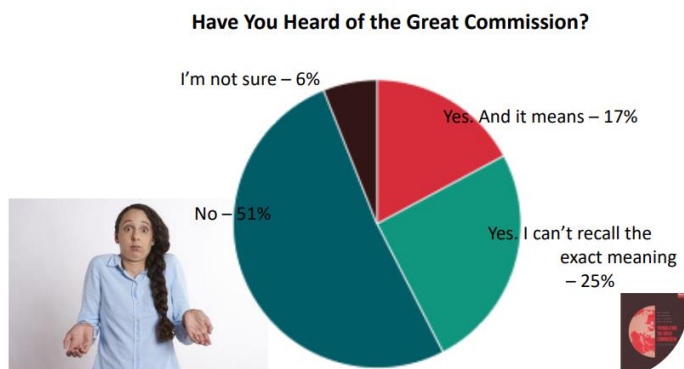
So Haere Mai, welcome to week 1 of RT...

Jesus' Great Commission – everyone knows it. Right?

We may know this as a well-known passage; one of the 'greats'. We may have read it many times, heard it preached on many times. But in reality, it is less well known than we may think. Particularly when it comes to church and personal engagement with Jesus' Commission.

For example: a recent study of committed church-going Christians in the United States showed that 6% weren't sure. 17%, yes they know it and it means. 25%, yes but can't recall the exact meaning.

A whopping 51% said no, they had not heard Jesus GC! That means two-thirds of Christians today, based on this Barna study, do not know what the Great Commission is.



Even more surprising, when given 6 Bible verses to choose from, only 37% recognised the 'Great Commission' referred to Matthew 28.



The image on the screen shows the different perspective of pastors and people in the church on the significance of Jesus' words in the Great Commission.



While many older Christ-followers know and believe in the significance of The Great Commission, research reflects that many young Christ-followers (those most likely to enter global missional engagement today) probably have the lowest understanding.

Elders = pre 1946 (77+)

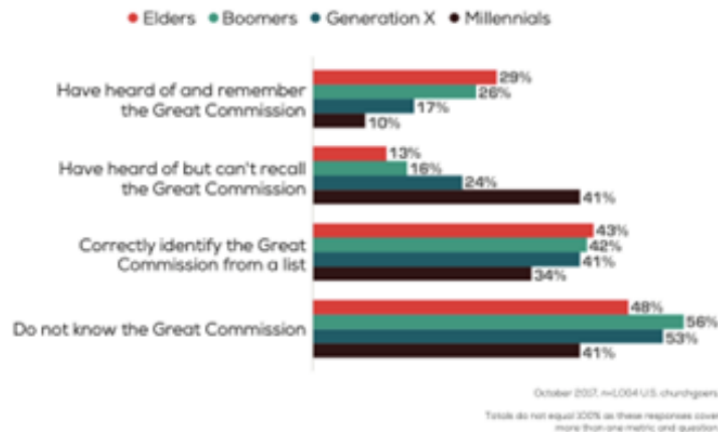
Boomers = 1946 -1964 (59-76)

Gen. x = 1966 – 1980 (58-43)

Mill. = 1980 – 1995 (Gen Y) (28-42)

(Gen Z = 2000f) (23-)

KNOWLEDGE OF THE GREAT COMMISSION, BY GENERATION



Where does this Commission come from?

The biblical basis for mission begins in Genesis 1:28 *God blessed them and said to them, "Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground."*

"This 'Creation Mandate' shows Adam and Eve were made to expand and nurture what God had established. After their fall into sin, the world changed. But God's vision did not.

The Great Commission in Matthew 28 is a reaffirmation of the mandate and blessing of joining God in achieving his original plan for creation." Between the 'Creation Mandate' and Jesus' 'Great Commission' lies the call of Abraham to every nation (Genesis 12:1-3).

"The Lord had said to Abram, "Go from your country, your people and your father's household to the land I will show you. "I will make you into a great nation, and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you."

From the start of Genesis to the end of Matthew's gospel, the message to "go to the nations" is clear.

Overview of the people groups of the world (as @ 8th June 2023)³

People Groups: 17,443

Unreached Groups: 7,386

Population: 8.00 Billion

Pop in Unreached: 3.40 Billion

% Pop in Unreached: 42.5%

³ [Joshua Project: People Groups of the World | Joshua Project](#)

It only ends when all nations gather before God and worship the Lamb (who is Jesus) in Revelation 7:9

"After this I looked, and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and before the Lamb."

Each gospel ends with a similar Commission from Jesus:

Mark 16:15–16 – *"He said to them, "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."*

Luke 24:44–49 – *"Then he opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures. He told them, "This is what is written: The Messiah will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, and repentance for the forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things. I am going to send you what my Father has promised; but stay in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high."*

John 20:19–23 – *"Again Jesus said, "Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you." And with that he breathed on them and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive anyone's sins, their sins are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven."*

Acts 1:4–8 – *"He said to them: "It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."*

The Great Commission in Matthew 28 is based on who Jesus is.

In Matthew 28 we have, perhaps, the greatest Christological statement of the whole New Testament: to Jesus *"has been given ALL authority in heaven and on earth"*. This is not a claim to some authority, or most authority - this is a claim to ALL authority. A claim to deity that permits no middle ground. In light of this verse, we cannot conclude that Jesus is a prophet, a great teacher, or a miracle worker. No, he is much, much more. He is the supreme authority in all heaven and earth.

Anyone, as C.S. Lewis stated, who makes the claim that Jesus did about himself, is either a liar, a lunatic, or Lord of all. There is no other alternative. He is either deluded, deliberately dishonest, or divine. When Jesus says all authority in heaven and earth has been given to him, Jesus means the authority to execute divine power on heaven and earth.

The proof of this claim is Jesus' life. He was betrayed, arrested, tried, convicted, beaten and crucified. Then he rose from the dead, stood before the disciples and declared, *"all authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me"*.

Jesus' claim is not one we can take half-heartedly or try to water down – we have not been left that option. The first response to the Great Commission is believing in Jesus' authority. *Believing Jesus' authority leads obeying to Jesus' command.*

Who is the Great Commission for?

Matthew 28:18-20 – Jesus came and told his disciples, *Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.*

Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.

If Jesus has 'all authority', he is now commanding 'all his disciples' to go for the sake of "all of the nations'. As the Barna study on the Great Commission concludes: "Citing his authority, Jesus makes no exceptions in this clear, parting command now at the core of mission's work. It is a command for every person in relationship with God. Most Christians, however, don't view it this way.

The first part of the Gospel is Go!

We've got to Go! It may be going down the street or across the world; but this command calls us to a dynamic, outward movement.

If you were to do a wee word study on the word "Go" you'll find something quite surprising. It means to travel from one place to another, there's movement, action, intention, obedience, required.

Of course, the disciples wanted to stay, just as they wanted to stay on the Mount of Transfiguration so they could be with Jesus. They wanted to huddle together and remain, but Jesus will soon explain that when they go – so will He. But *stay-ing* is the opposite of *Go-ing*

This command to 'go', that Jesus has left for us (yes)...is consistent with God's call to 'go' in the lives of the Old Testament leaders:

God's call to Abraham (Genesis 12: 1-2) – *"Go from your country and your relatives and father's house to the land I will show you. And I will make you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you...*

God's call to Moses (Exodus 4:11-12) – *The Lord said to him, "Who gave human beings their mouths? Who makes them deaf or mute? Who gives them sight or makes them blind? Is it not I, the Lord? Now go; I will help you speak and will teach you what to say."*

God's call to Jeremiah (Jeremiah 1:7-8) – *"But the Lord said to me, "Do not say, 'I am too young.' You must go to everyone I send you to and say whatever I command you. Do not be afraid of them, for I am with you and will rescue you," declares the Lord."*

God's call to Micah (Micah 2:10) – *"Get up, go away! For this is not your resting place, because it is defiled, it is ruined, beyond all remedy."*

God's call to Jonah (Jonah 1:2) – *"Go to the great city of Nineveh and preach against it, because its wickedness has come up before me."*

And God's call to Paul (Acts 22: 21) – *"Then the Lord said to me, 'Go; I will send you far away to the Gentiles.'*

This 'go' is a dynamic command and not a casual suggestion. The question becomes – *are we moving out and are we going?*

Worship and Doubt

We're told in v.17 of Matt. 28 that when the disciples saw Jesus, they *worshipped* him, but some *doubted*. I love that this is recorded in our Bibles. The inclusion of their doubt rings true from all we know of the disciples and what we know of ourselves. Yes, we believe Jesus is the risen Lord and has all authority. But we also doubt. Doubt ourselves. Doubt our place in God's mission.

Notice that Jesus didn't say I am sending most of you... just the ones who don't doubt. No, Jesus sends them all, including the doubters. He calls them to work out, or work through, their doubts as they go. We too are worshipping-doubting people who are told to 'go', despite, and with, our doubts.

Matthew 28:18-20 is a text that has great relevance for and prominence in the life of the church, today. And we must position ourselves *to hear what God is saying and to God where God is leading us*.

Our legacy, our story

Folks we stand in a rich legacy. The first six people that NZ Baptists sent overseas into global work were all single women. Their commitment to the Bengali people was huge. Two died in South Asia and were buried there, and one remained in her place working with women for 40 years. What people like Rosalie MacGeorge, Hopestill Pillow, and Amy Cowles (incidentally the first global worker to travel to South Asia by plane)⁴ began has been added to and grown through 6 generations of partnership between New Zealander's and South Asian people groups.

We have been committed trailblazers called by God in a wonderful adventure. God wants you to be a part of this story - fully in. These folk understood the call of Jesus' to "Go" didn't end at Matt. 28:16-20, and it won't end with us. Let's be part of the "Go"! And as we do, remember Jesus' concluding promise in his commission to us: *And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.*"

⁴ [Arotahi whakapapa - Arotahi - NZBMS - New Zealand Baptist Missionary Society.](#)

HEAR what God is saying, and GO where God is leading us.

Creator God,

In the beginning, you created the heavens and the earth. You made humankind and spoke life into being. All of creation – visible and invisible – is held together in your hands. How good it is! But we are mindful that our world groans under the scars of brokenness. It waits in eager hope for your fullness, when you return.

So, until that day, we pray. We pray for those people and places who are suffering with rising sea levels, famines, droughts, resource scarcity, and increasingly frequent extreme weather events. Along with these, our world faces many environmental challenges. As your church we have not always been the stewards you call us to be.

We forget that this earth is our common home. That it is a gift to be shared by all – not exploited by a few. May we go to the places you call us to. From corner to corner, may we labour in eagerness for your hope. So together, Lord, call us and lead us into your mission for us, locally and globally, for your glory.

In the name of Jesus. Amen