

Th131 God's Plan

Lesson Th131-36 The Great Commission

Have you ever been asked to do something and then discovered that the person who asked you to do it did not have the right or the authority to do it themselves? This can lead to all kinds of problems. But when a person does have the authority, it is amazing what can be accomplished. This lesson will reveal who holds ultimate authority in heaven and on earth.

The previous lesson explained how Jesus was crucified. He died and then descended into the grave, where He preached to the captives there. He explained that He had died in their place and that His blood had washed away all of their sins. Jesus then led all of these who loved God up out of the grave and they ascended into the presence of God, their Father.

God's plan to have children who chose to love and serve Him had now come to pass. He had revealed himself to mankind over many hundreds of years. Man now understood His unlimited power, His holiness, and through the death of Jesus, man had also learned of God's perfect love. John the apostle wrote: "For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son, that whosoever believes in him shall not perish, but have everlasting life" (John 3:16). The apostle Paul would later write, "God demonstrates his own love towards us in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us" (Rom 5:8).

Jesus died Friday afternoon. His body was taken down from the cross and hastily buried before sunset. Remember, for the Jews the new day did not begin with sunrise, but actually began with sunset. Jesus remained in the grave all day Saturday, which is the Sabbath or holy day for the Jews. Because this was the Sabbath of Passover it was considered a High Sabbath or special Sabbath. Jews were not allowed to do any work on their Sabbath. Thus Jesus' body lay undisturbed in the grave.

It was the tradition of the Jews to bury their dead without any embalming to preserve the body. Instead they would wash the body and wrap it with cloth. Spices and perfumes would be wrapped in the cloth. This would help cover the smell as the body decayed. The dead were not buried in the ground but were placed in caves or tombs cut out of rocky hillsides. The tombs were often large enough for more than one person to be buried. The person's body would decompose until eventually only bones remained. Because of this, graves were considered a ceremonially unclean place. Any person who touched the dead or the grave would be considered unclean and not allowed to participate in anything holy until they had gone through the process of ceremonial cleansing. After the body was completely decomposed, relatives of the dead person would remove the bones from the grave and place them in a stone box. In this way a grave would belong to a family for many generations and be used over and over again. But Jesus was buried in a brand new tomb that had never been used before. This is very significant. Jesus, even in death, would not become defiled or unclean.

The disciples of Jesus mourned for him all day Saturday. It was the Sabbath and they could not do anything until Sunday, the first day of the week. Early Sunday morning some of the

women disciples went to the tomb, carrying spices that they had prepared so that they could properly bury Jesus. They discovered that the stone covering the entrance to the burial cave had been rolled away. Entering the tomb, they found to their dismay that Jesus' body was gone. Suddenly two men in clothes that gleamed like lightning stood beside them. The frightened women bowed with their faces to the ground, but the men said to them, "Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here; he has risen!"

Jesus was indeed alive. Over the next 40 days He would appear to over 500 different people in various places and times. One day He appeared before them on the Mount of Olives, a hillside about a day's walk from Jerusalem. While they were all gathered around Him He 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" (Matt 28:18-20). While they all stood watching, Jesus ascended into the sky and then was gone into heaven.

This last statement Jesus made before ascending into heaven is pivotal in human history. Up until the death of Jesus, Satan had retained his power and authority. Through the death of Jesus, Satan's power and authority were stripped from him. He was condemned and sentenced to a future eternal punishment in the Lake of Fire. Thus God bestowed upon the risen Christ all authority in heaven and on earth. Jesus immediately delegated authority to His disciples by giving them a command.

When a king commands a person to do something, the person becomes the king's representative. Therefore the task they go about doing, they do not do on their own initiative or authority, but under the king's authority. Anyone who would resist their accomplishing the king's work does not resist the person, but is resisting the king. In this way Jesus delegated authority to His disciples by commanding them to go and make disciples of all nations. It is very important for us to realize that when we tell others about Christ, we are doing so under the authority of Jesus the King. Those who resist the gospel are not resisting us, but rather they are resisting the King. It is not our responsibility to punish or correct those who resist the gospel. Jesus the King is the one who will enforce His authority with His power.

With this lesson we now see an entire shift in the history of mankind. Before Jesus' death, resurrection, and ascension, God's children were under the penalty of sin which was death and punishment apart from God. The children lived without power or authority in their lives. They lived under a strict set of laws that taught them the holiness of God. But now through Jesus, God's love has accomplished what His law could not. God's children who accept Jesus are made holy through His blood. They have an elder brother, Jesus the Christ, who is King of all kings and Lord of all lords, who holds the keys of death and the grave, and who has all authority in heaven and earth. Though believers as well as unbelievers face death, those who die in Christ go directly into the presence of God.

This lesson is **important** because it reminds us that God's plan to have children, who chose to love and serve Him, had now come to pass. Because of Jesus' death on the cross, as

payment for the sins of the world, Satan's authority is gone. All authority belongs to Christ, and he has commissioned His followers to go in His authority to make disciples of all nations.

The **main truth** of this lesson is that because Jesus died and rose from the dead, he has been given all authority in heaven and earth. With that authority he sends out God's children with the gospel message.

Let's **review** what you learned in this lesson.

1. On what day of the week was Jesus raised from the dead? [Pause 5 seconds]
A. If you said, "Sunday, the first day of the week," you answered correctly.
2. What authority did Jesus say he had been given after he arose from the dead? [Pause]
A. If you answered, "Jesus had been given all authority in heaven and on earth," you are correct.
3. What did Jesus do with His authority before He ascended into heaven? [Pause]
A. If you said that Jesus gave His authority to His disciples by commissioning them to go and make disciples, you are right.

Your **assignment** is to think about the implications of Jesus' death and resurrection and how He delegated authority to all of His followers. Then, use the authority Jesus has given to you, and share the Good News with someone.