

God's Plan for Missions

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[0 : 0 0] us to obedience. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen. Well, to continue this mission's theme this morning, we're going to be looking at Matthew 28 at the Great Commission. And if you're familiar with where this takes place in the book of Matthew, this is the very, very end of Matthew's gospel. Matthew, unlike some of the other gospels, doesn't spend a whole lot of time after Jesus' resurrection. He seems as though he's getting quickly to this climax of his gospel in verse 16. And so let's read together Matthew 28, starting in verse 16.

Then the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had told them to go. And when they saw him, they worshipped 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. This is the word of God.

So I have a small office at the Free Church building, which is located at the top of the mound. It's on the second floor. And if you know the building, the back of the building faces this courtyard that you can get to from the Royal Mile. So naturally, it's a place where you get a lot of tourists, a lot of tour groups come through there. So it can be kind of distracting when I'm at my desk and hear these kind of this constant cycle of tourists. But this past week, as I was preparing for the sermon, I heard something rather unusual. Instead of the typical speech from the tour guide, I heard this harmonica playing. And it was this harmonica playing the theme song to the Titanic movie, My Heart Will Go On. And it was so bizarre that I had to turn around from my desk and look outside my window to see who is doing this, where is this coming from? And it was this young, probably 20-something year old guy who was sitting on the wall right outside my window, playing this song on a harmonica over and over again. And I'm kidding you not, it was probably 20 minutes he's going on. And to be perfectly honest, it was not the most skillful rendition of this song I've ever heard. It might have been he just got this harmonica as a gift.

It was so bizarre, I didn't have any context for why he was there, why he was playing this song with this instrument. And it's made me think, as it relates to this passage today, this is something that we're very, a passage we're likely very familiar with. But it may seem very bizarre when it's taken out of context, as it often can be. Anytime you have a missions week, this is kind of the go-to passage that people preach from. But it may not be with full understanding of what's going on, what's the context.

I had no idea why this guy was there. Was he a student? Was he a tourist? Was this a new skill? Was he practicing for something? If I was in his shoes, I don't know, this courtyard is surrounded by walls on four sides with offices and flats reaching six stories up. A very public place to be playing. And I had no context for what he was doing. And so similarly today, I think it's often we can, we can hear these words of Jesus. We can know that this is a command that he gives us, but not remember the context in which they're given. And so that's what I want us to look at today as we consider, where does this command fit into the biblical narrative? What does it have to do with God's overall mission? And so what I want us to consider then as we look at this passage is I want us to think back. I want us to consider not to see this great commission as a starting point, as if it's a new command for a new plan that God has, but to see it as more of a midpoint. That we can look back to see all that has happened that has brought us to this point and then recognize what this calling means for us going forward. And so let's start then by looking back. What is this great commission? How does it relate to this? What is this mission's mandate that we're given? How does it relate to everything we see prior in the scriptures? And I think we get our first clues about how the great commission relates to the past. Actually, when we, we stay in the new Testament, when we

move to the book of Acts, if you're familiar with the book of Acts, this gives the story of the New Testament church. We know that after Jesus ascended to heaven, he promised that he would send a helper. His Holy Spirit came and dwelled his people, gave them the power and the ability to preach the gospel to those around them. And through the work of the Spirit, we see many come to Christ. We see the beginnings of the New Testament church. And so interesting, as we walk through the book of

[5 : 15] Acts, there's this contention that starts to build among some of Jesus' disciples when they question, who is the gospel for? Is the gospel meant just for God's people, the Jewish people, or is it meant for Gentiles too? And so if we look to Acts 15, we see the disciples debating and some are arguing rightly the gospel is meant for all. But it's interesting, it's not recorded here, what you may think would be the basis for this argument to say, hey, look, Jesus told us to go make disciples of all nations. And so this is what we're going to do.

Instead in Acts 15, it records James quoting from the Old Testament from the prophet Amos. And he says these words, after this I will return and rebuild David's fallen tent. Its ruins I will rebuild and I will restore it, that the rest of mankind may seek the Lord, even all the Gentiles who bear my name, says the Lord who does these things, things known from long ago. And so for James here, the basis of his argument is the basis of his argument is not simply the words of Jesus, but the prophecy from long ago that points forward to Jesus. Again, if we stay in Acts 13, the Apostle Paul is preaching in Antioch to a large Jewish group who gets very jealous of the thought that he is proclaiming this gospel among the Gentiles. And again, you may expect, here's a spot where Paul can base his efforts on the words of Jesus. Look, Jesus, I'm doing this because Jesus told me to. But he doesn't do that either. He too points back to another prophet, to the prophet Isaiah. What we read earlier, I have made you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring salvation to the ends of the earth. So again, he's not ignoring the words of Jesus, but he's pointing out how Jesus' command that he gives us here in the end of Matthew is consistent with prophecy from long ago. And so this not only occurs among Jesus' disciples, but we see this from the words of Jesus himself.

I mentioned that the gospel of Matthew is very condensed, how it ends from resurrection until the Great Commission. But if we look to the gospel of Luke in chapter 24, Jesus appears to his disciples a few times, it says. And in each time, he's trying to give them understanding as to what has happened, what God's mission is. And it says that he points to the law of Moses and to the prophets and to the Psalms so that they may understand what the scripture says concerning himself. And so Jesus is telling his disciples that this story of redemption, it doesn't simply begin at the cross. But God, from the beginning of time, has been working, that he's always had a plan, a mission for the salvation of his people. And so thinking back on the Great Commission, these words, they may sound new to us, but in fact, it's a repeat of what we hear over and over again in the scriptures. And the two things that should stick out to us as we read this commission is first, God reigns. We see Jesus as king, but he also has a role for his people. And so as we look back at the Old Testament then, to kind of provide an overview of the context of this Great Commission, we're going to see that over and over again.

God's reign and his role for man. And so if we think again, if we go back to the very beginning of the Bible, to the book of Genesis, which includes a creation story, it begins, in the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.

[9 : 01] God is asserting himself as creator, as ruler over everything. And it gives us account of what happens on each day of creation.

And so on day six, we see the creation of man. Man made in God's image. This is supposed to be the pinnacle of his creation. And we say on that very same day that God gives man a commission. A commission to fill the earth and to subdue and rule over all creation.

And so when we hear the words to rule and to subdue, in our day and age that may have a negative connotation. We may think of tyranny and abuse from certain governments. But that's not what God is instructing Adam to do here, because we recognize that this commission is given before the fall, before sin has entered the world.

And so this commission to subdue and to rule, it's given in the context of perfect union with God. That his image bearers may spread his blessing throughout all the earth.

And so it really points forward because after day six comes day seven, where God rests. And it's in this Sabbath rest that we recognize this full, we have this full realization of God's presence with his

people.

[10 : 28] And so this subduing and this ruling, this command that's given to Adam is pointing to this day. That Adam is to be effectively gathering together all of creation for the praise and the worship and the glory of God.

But if we know the story of creation, this is short lived. This is not a role that Adam is able to complete or fulfill completely. We know that through Adam, sin and death enter the world. And this role, this priestly role that Adam has, has been broken. And as a result, he's banished from the garden. And so even though this, this role of Adam has, was a failure on his part, God's reign was not compromised.

His desire to dwell with his people doesn't change. And so from there we can move forward a little bit further in the Old Testament to, to the chapter 12 of Genesis, where we see God coming to a man named Abram.

Now this was a low point of human existence. Society was fractured. There was no man who had knowledge of God or desire for him. But God chooses to come to Abraham.

[11 : 39] And you may think of Abraham, if you've heard this story before, you think Abraham was a good guy, right? God, he followed after God. What we need to recognize here is there's nothing special about Abraham here.

He is a pagan, just like everyone around him in that day. But despite that, God comes to him. And God promises to bless him. He says, I will be your God and you will be my people. And so he promises blessing that he would be a great nation.

That kings would come from him. That through him all nations would be blessed. And so it's really a reassertion of this original purpose of mankind that we saw in the garden.

That God would rule and that man would mediate, would extend God's blessing to the ends of the earth. Well, this family of Abraham grew. We fast forward to the book of Exodus.

[12 : 39] We see that they've fallen into captivity. They're slaves in Egypt. But we see God's promise endures. He raises up this leader, Moses.

He leads the people of Israel out of Egypt through the Red Sea where Pharaoh and his pursuing army are swallowed up by the waters. And so here, another image of recreation.

God's demonstrating his rule over the earth and he commissions Israel again in Exodus 19. He tells them to be a kingdom of priests. A holy nation.

So much like Adam and much like Abraham, he sets his people apart for the sake of the nations. And so this is what we sing about in the Psalms.

We sing from Psalm 96, let the nations be glad. We see it all throughout the Psalms. Psalm 67, it says, may God be gracious to us and bless us and make his face to shine on us so that your ways may be known on earth and your salvation among the nations.

[13 : 44] It's a proclamation of God's blessing on his people Israel so that Israel may bless the nations. But again, we see that Israel failed at this task.

We know the story of their rebellion against God. They forgot his provision. They turned to other gods. But yet God's mission endured.

We fast forward to 2 Samuel 7. There's this young man, David, who's anointed king of Israel to serve as a representative for his people. And much like Adam and Abraham in Israel, he's commissioned to spread the will and the reign of God over all the nations.

And the reign of God over all the earth. It's this covenant blessing that was made with Adam and Israel now is given and continues through David. Of course, we know how the story goes.

We could predict it at this point, even if you don't know the story. David fails. Following kings fail to fulfill this role. Not only do they fail to spread God's blessing to the nations, they lead their own nation astray.

[14 : 50] And so despite this consistent failure of God's people, God's mission is not thwarted and his promise is not broken. Because we know that God eventually sends another king from the line of David.

Someone who'd not only lead the people of Israel, but also be a light to the nation. So this is, of course, his own son, Jesus.

Is he alone who could perfectly fulfill the law? Who could pay the penalty for our sins, for our rebellion on the cross? Who could defeat the curse of death and rise from the dead?

And so we see it's this Jesus who is the second Adam. Who is the seed of Abraham. Who is the faithful and true Israel.

Who is the greater David who brings salvation to the nations. And so it's this Messiah then that not only confirms God's reign, but also he fulfills this role that he had give to Israel.

[15 : 53] He fulfills God's world mission. And so that's just the quick overview of what brings us to this point of Jesus' resurrection and this command that he gives his people.

And we recognize if we see that this is the focus, the focus of the Old Testament is continually on this people of God, the people of Abraham, the people of Israel. But we need to recognize that God's mission throughout, it doesn't change.

It's always meant to be extended to the nations. And so think about it this way. Think about a photographer at a football match. Right? You know, if it's a professional match, you have these photographers that line the sidelines with these big zoom in cameras.

And they try to capture these close up shots of players in action. And as they try to capture those shots, it's not as though they're disregarding what's going on on the pitch. They're watching the whole game.

But what they're trying to do is capture this image within the context of the game. Because if there wasn't a game going on, there'd be no sense for them to be there. They wouldn't be taking photographs at all.

[16 : 58] And so similar is true here. God is focusing on Israel, but it's not to the exclusion of the nations. He focuses on Israel precisely because He cares for the nations.

He blesses Israel so that the nations may be blessed. And so when we turn back to this Great Commission in Matthew, it's as if God is taking that camera and He's zooming out.

So He's bringing into frame this whole plan, this whole mission that He's had from the very beginning of time. And so that's how this Great Commission connects us to the past.

It shows us God's mission has not changed up to this point, and it doesn't change going forward. So what does this mission then mean for us today? Well, let's consider how it pushes us forward.

Thinking again of God's reign and our rule. What we just looked at, God's reign never changes throughout this mission. He is the creator of heavens and earth.

[18 : 00] He is the God of Abraham. He is the deliverer of Israel. He's the overseer of King David. And so we see this emphasis then played out here in this Great Commission as well.

Because in verse 16 it mentions that disciples went to Galilee up to this mountain where Jesus had directed them. Now, if we had had the time to kind of do a complete overview of the Gospel of Matthew, you may recognize that Matthew kind of pinpoints specific narratives or stories that occur on top of a mountain.

When Matthew directs our attention to a mountain top, something important is going on there. We see it over and over again in this Gospel. First, where Jesus is sent up to a mountain where he's tempted by Satan.

We see the Sermon on the Mount. We see the Transfiguration where Jesus reveals his glory only temporarily to his disciples on top of a mountain.

And so here, this final scene, of course, appropriately takes place on top of this mountain. And we see that it's in contrast, it stands in contrast to that very first mountain scene where Jesus is tempted by Satan.

[19 : 12] Where Satan comes and he's questioning Jesus' authority and his plan. He's trying to interfere with this mission. But now we see Matthew. Matthew shows us this final scene where Jesus is revealed as the exalted ruler with comprehensive authority over heaven and earth.

And with a mission that has not been compromised. And so notice the language again of this great commission. How comprehensive it is. 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 the Son and the Holy Spirit. He's including even here the full resources of the Trinity.

Pointing that out to us. Teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always to the very end of age. And so what we need to remember about this great commission is that the authority of Jesus is foundational to this mandate.

And so then what does it mean for our role? Well again, our role has not changed throughout God's mission. Remember what we looked at already. Man had this priestly role.

[20 : 23] This was the responsibility that was given to Adam in the garden. To extend God's blessing throughout all creation for his glory. Adam failed.

Abraham failed. Israel failed. David failed. David failed. Which makes our passage all the more interesting. Because we go to verse 17. And we notice this, maybe a strange detail. Because it says, when they saw him they worshipped him. But some doubted. Now you think, if you were the writer of this gospel, you're telling of the greatness of Jesus who is just resurrected from the dead.

It seems like a fact you'd purposefully want to leave out here. As if you'd want to talk about this crucified savior who's been resurrected, who conquered the grave. And now everyone is amazed. And everyone understands what Jesus came for. And everyone has full faith and assurance in Jesus. And that's not what it says. He talks about the disciples' failure.

[21 : 28] These men who have been with us for three years, they still doubted. And so this is particularly concerning them, considering this commission that Jesus is about to give them.

He's speaking to this small handful of disciples. And he's once again giving the same command. To rule and subdue. How do they do that?

They're supposed to do that by making disciples of the nations. To extend God's blessing to the ends of the earth. These few little men, after their track record, this is the mission that God gives them? You might think that Jesus would be in his full right to change course.

To say, look, the reason I came is because of your failure. And now, even though you see me in resurrected form, you're still doubt. I'm done using you.

I will accomplish my mission on my own. But of course, he doesn't say that. I have four kids. As many of you know, two of them are boys.

[22 : 30] And they love to help me fix things. And so whenever I get my toolbox out, and I'm not a particularly handy guy myself, but I try my best. So when I get my toolbox out, it's like moths that are going to light.

They immediately see and come over. What are you fixing? How can I help you? And depending on what I'm doing, I want to include them in this, whether that's just to use a hammer or a screwdriver or whatever it may be.

Because when we complete that task, they get the satisfaction of thinking that they have helped me. That they have led to the completion of this project. But the reality is, if it wasn't for my presence, if it wasn't for my knowledge, if it wasn't for my supervision and instruction, whatever we're trying to fix wouldn't have happened.

And so the same is true here. Jesus commissions us to spread the gospel. But we're not the ones who are sent out on our own to accomplish this task.

It's done through the power of the Spirit. And so if you've been with us during our evening series, we've been looking at our identity. Last week, we looked at our identity in Christ.

[23 : 34] Paul says this over and over again in his letters in the New Testament. That we are in Christ. And so that idea is essential to this commission here. That we are in Christ.

That's what makes this commission possible. Because if we were sent out on our own, again, the record would be the same. We would fail. But here we are commissioned, having been chosen by the Father, having been redeemed by the Son, now indwelt and empowered by the Spirit to go. So God's plan will succeed because it is Christ's Spirit who is doing the work. It is his ever-present Holy Spirit who he says here will always be with us to the end of the age.

It is his Spirit who emboldens us to go. And it's also his Spirit who enables those who hear. Who softens the heart. Who is able to apply the gospel of grace to these recipients.

And so we can take heart then. Because I think the Great Commission can be something that can scare us to death sometimes. To think that we are too ill-equipped.

[24 : 45] That we have too great a fear of man. That we just don't know what to do. But we see here that it is the work of Jesus living in us who empowers us to accomplish his mission.

And so as we are empowered by Christ, letting that be our foundation, what exactly are we called to do? And just to look at this briefly. It's a very simple task. He doesn't go on for a chapter here and say every little thing that we must do to complete his mission.

He says make disciples by baptizing and teaching. And so you may think well that sounds like I'm maybe off the hook. Because I'm not a minister so I don't baptize people and I don't preach.

But when we think about baptism here. It's a symbolism. A symbol of repentance. It's this act of repenting. Turning from sin.

Dying to self. This is why Paul says in Romans 8. We are buried with Christ in baptism and raised to walk in newness of life. In baptism also we see this unity that we have with the Trinity.

[26 : 00] This is what Jesus mentioned here. We walk in unity with the three persons of God. The Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit. This is our new identity. So we should strive as we are about this mandate.

To see this change and transformation occur in the lives of those around us. And then not only that but it's supposed to affect how we live. That second part.

Teaching them to observe all I have commanded. It doesn't mean teach people to be good. So that God will have favor on them. But it's pointing out the fact that if God, if our identity is now in Christ. If we are living in unity with the Godhead. Then that's going to affect how we live. There's this natural desire to be more and more like Jesus. Out of a heart of gratitude.

We want to be obedient as we follow him. And so again, this is what we want to see in the lives of those around us. As we extend the gospel, this should be the effect that we see on the unbelieving world.

[26 : 59] That they may be baptized and learn to follow after Jesus. And so we recognize then that when, if we're called to this task. It's not going to be easy.

It's going to take time. And it's going to take effort. It takes relationship building. It takes sacrifice. It takes prayer and vulnerability.

But the thing is, think about our setting here. We live in the capital city of Scotland where the nations have come to us.

The nations are quite literally at our footsteps. And what are we doing about it? We just jump in. One of the upp πον is calling it, right? We have more and more, really, more Ilegar. One of theungsans. And if not, we have more ■■■■■■■■.

We're going to serve a mixture of phobs creative, anything. You're going to craft. You have to talk about, we're not here's why, but exposing■■■. And if we can go into thiswnie blood flow. We want to organize the newspaper. But, we have aard to do it eens, and we want to post it eventually. We want to reference that we can ask you what everybody shall say. We have any questions for writers, dear. You just rock out and■ so are notras■three and funny is, great. You know nothing more about when we get out on our body.

[28 : 00] at a very volatile time in the Chinese history, and he just became completely overwhelmed by the burden of mission. There was such great need, and there were so few workers for the harvest.

And so he wrote this brief appeal, this brief note that was called The Appeal from China that was published in something called The Missionary Herald. And I want to read just a portion of what he wrote.

Of course, I put my bookmark on the wrong page. In this appeal that's to be read by those back in the UK, he's saying that God has abundantly answered prayers by opening tens of thousands of doors.

And so now what should people pray at missionary prayer meetings? What are you going to pray for next? He says, Has God been thankful for pouring down his blessing that actually there is no room for it?

Where are the men and women? Where are the gold and silver? What are we living for? The dear brethren at home would perhaps get a new and unexpected blessing if they should each, in their private closet, pray again and again this simple prayer.

[29 : 15] O Holy Father in heaven, forever blessed be thy gracious name for so abundantly opening the heathen lands. And now again for the sake of the all-merciful Savior, grant thy most Holy Spirit to teach me what I must do for those who worship wood and stone.

Yea, what must even I do? And so that appeal is the same for us today. Have we ever asked that question before?

What must I do? What has God called me to? Because if we're really committed to this, if we really take this commission seriously, if we really understand God's mission, this is something we're going to want to be a part of.

To see the advancement of the gospel. To be willing to give up our time and our money and our effort to see this happen. And so are we willing to pray earnestly?

Are we willing to give sacrificially? Are we willing to serve locally? And yes, some of us maybe even go globally to see this mission come to pass.

[30 : 28] But the reality is that we have to remember here is that our goal in mission is not simply a concern for the lost. Our goal in mission is founded on a passion for the glory of God.

Because although Christ ascended, he promises to come again. And he says when he comes again, there will be final judgment for evil and for sin. But for his people, he will create a new heaven and a new earth.

He will establish his eternal kingdom where he will live in perfect unity with his people forever and forever receive the glory he is due. And so this is what John writes about in the end of the Bible.

In the book of Revelation chapter 7. He says, This is the goal of mission.

This is the goal of mission.

[32 : 12] God's continuing plan of salvation that has never changed from the beginning of time until now. Yet he calls us in and equips us with his spirit to be about his mission with him.

And so may we be willing to answer this call. And this call is different for every single one of us. But it is a call nonetheless. So the question is, how can you serve?

What are you called to? How may we as a church see the kingdom expand here in Edinburgh? That God may receive the glory he is due.

Let's pray together. God, you are worthy of all praise and all honor and all glory. And so we recognize that your mission has never changed from the beginning of time.

Your mission has been to gather your people together. To live in union with us. And so may that be our desire.

[33 : 22] May that be our focus. God, if there's some here that don't know you, we ask that you may soften hearts to the reality of the gospel. That they may recognize the invitation that you give to be a part of this kingdom.

And God, I ask that you motivate us all to be about your mission. Not of our own efforts or our own strength or our own cleverness. But through the power of your spirit that we may see the nations come to worship you.

We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Will you stand with me for the singing of our last hymn, By Faith? Amen.

By faith we see the hand of God. In the light of creation's grand desire.

In the lives of those who prove His faithfulness. Who walk by faith and not by sight.

[34 : 46] By faith our fathers roamed the earth. With the power of His promise in their hearts.

Of a holy city built by God's own hand. A place where peace and justice reign.

We will stand as children of the promise. We will fix our eyes on Him.

Our souls reward. Till the race is finished and the work is done.

After an adventures