The Great Claim

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[0:00] So, these closing words of Matthew's gospel are often called the Great Commission, and it is! The Great Commission is to go and make disciples of all nations.

! This Great Commission is preceded, and it's based on, it rests on a great claim made by the Lord Jesus in verse 18, where Jesus says to the disciples, all authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.
That is the great claim that Jesus makes, and that's what we're going to look at for a few minutes this evening. I want to begin with just a couple of observations, and the first is that today, as we meet here in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, more than ever before, there are groups of Christ followers all across the globe in more nations, tribes, languages, people groups than ever before.
Just from my own experience, I've been privileged to experience a small part of that huge diversity. I remember attending four-hour-long services in Nigeria, which featured a lot of dancing, or meeting a saffron-robed leader of Christ devotees in North India, or taking part in prayer meetings where people prayed in Dari, Farsi, Sarani, as well as in English.
And I've got friends who have translated the language of a remote tribe in Papua New Guinea. Another friend who's translated it into the language of a Himalayan nomadic tribe.
[2:09] And in both these people groups, there are churches today. I've also had the privilege of worshiping in multi-ethnic churches in the Gulf, and also services conducted in Nepali, Urdu, Hindi, Ladakh, Gaelic, Hungarian, Tamil, Malayalam, and a number of other languages, too.

And of course, worshiping in many congregations in the Free Church of Scotland as well. But all of these are centered on the same Lord Jesus Christ. And that's just a tiny fraction of what's going on in the world today.
And that's amazing when you think of that it all began with a few very ordinary, uneducated folk in Galilee, in a backwater at the edge of the Roman Empire 2,000 years ago.
But the second observation is that there are still huge areas of the world. Peoples, languages, ethnic groups that are hardly reached with the gospel of Jesus Christ.
There are still over 1,400 languages that have no part of the Bible translated. Closer to home, there are villages, towns, parts of cities with very little in the way of access to the gospel and widespread ignorance of the Bible's message.
[3:30] And that's true of this city, too. There are also people groups within our own nation with few or no believers among them. And of course, every new generation needs to be evangelized, needs to be taught the gospel.

So there is still much work to be done. So as we think of the Great Commission in Matthew 28, 18 to 20, perhaps the key word in that is the word all, which appears four times in these few verses. This is my own translation, which is slightly clunky, but it brings out the fact that this word all is there four times. So the key word is all.
There's all authority, all nations, all Jesus' commands, and all the time. But this evening, our time is short, so I just want to focus really on the first of those, all authority.
And this is the great claim that Jesus makes on which the Great Commission rests. All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to Jesus Christ.
[5:09] He's claiming universal kingship. If you read any of the gospels, you'll soon realize that a phrase that Jesus used a lot was the kingdom of God or the kingdom of heaven.

And the kingdom of God, the kingdom of heaven, has drawn near with the coming of Jesus. And here, at the end of Matthew, very clearly, Jesus is identifying himself as that king.
He is the king. He is making that claim of himself. And he's saying that it's been given to him, given to him by God the Father.

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But that raises at least three questions for us. And I want to look at those. First of all, the question is, why should we believe him? Second, when was this authority given to Jesus?
And third, what kind of king is Jesus? First of all, then, why should we believe him? You might read or hear this claim.
[6:14] All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. And you might think, hang on a minute. How can this man, this first century Jewish peasant from near the margins of the Roman Empire, who was also crucified in utter humiliation, how can he claim to be the king of the whole world?

How can he claim to be the lord of the entire universe? Why should his disciples believe him? And why should we today believe him? Why should we believe this claim?
Well, just to give a bit of context, the Jewish scriptures, what we call the Old Testament, prophesied a Messiah figure, one who would come and reign with justice and righteousness.
And he would be the king of the Israelites, but also his kingship, his authority would extend over all nations. And here's just a sample of, there's more than this, but this is just a sample of some of the passages in the Old Testament.
So first of all, Genesis 49, 10, that the scepter will not depart from Judah, nor the ruler's staff from between his feet, until he to whom it belongs shall come, and the obedience of the nations shall be his.
[7:42] Or Psalm 72, which is, I suppose, like a prayer about the king in the line of David and Solomon, may he rule from sea to sea, and from the river to the ends of the earth.

May all kings bow down to him, and all nations serve him. But there's one passage in particular that Jesus is riffing off in this Great Commission, and that is Daniel chapter 7.
And in that chapter, Daniel has this vision, the prophet Daniel has a vision of four ferocious beasts that represent four kings and four empires.
And then Daniel sees heaven and the throne of God, and God in this vision is given the title the Ancient of Days. And Daniel writes that in the visions of the night, this is Daniel 7, 13, and 14, and you can listen to the resemblances with the Great Commission, these words from Matthew 28.
Daniel writes, in the visions of the night, I saw one like a son of man coming with the clouds of heaven. He came to the Ancient of Days and was presented before him. He was given authority, honor, and kingship.
[9:06] All peoples, nations, and languages will serve him. His authority is an everlasting authority. That will not pass away.

And his kingdom will never be destroyed. So not for the first time, Jesus identifies himself with this exalted figure in Daniel's vision.
This one like a son of man. And you maybe heard some of the echoes of this passage in Jesus' words. All authority given to him. All nations serving him.
And all of the time. That it would be an everlasting kingship. So Jesus is claiming that he is this king. He is this Messiah.
He is this son of man. Now this meeting in Galilee at which Jesus says this takes place days, or at the most weeks, after Jesus was brutally crucified by the Roman Empire, having been mocked and ridiculed for his claim to be a king.
[10:14] And yet here he was, that same Jesus, who had been crucified, now standing before them alive. The tomb where his corpse had been laid is empty.

Because Jesus has been raised from the dead by the power of God. And that resurrection vindicates Jesus and all the claims that he made.
We know about vindication, cases of vindication. For example, in recent history, there was the post office scandal where many postmasters were falsely accused of fiddling the books.
And some of them were put in jail. And then it was discovered and came to light that it was a computer system fault. And those postmasters have been vindicated.
Their innocence has been declared and they have been vindicated of all the wrong that they were accused of. will magnify that by an infinite amount and you'll see what the resurrection does for Jesus.
[11:28] The human verdict on Jesus was that he was a fake king, that he was an imposter, deserving only of rejection and torture and death. But God has utterly turned that verdict on its head.

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This rising from the dead is the most spectacular and stunning vindication of Jesus and of all that he claimed to be, all that he claimed for himself, including that he is the Messiah, that he is the Son of Man, that he is the King.
And this resurrection of Jesus is something that these disciples witness with their own eyes on this occasion. They are there, they see him before them. And on a number of other occasions, they saw him alive after his suffering, after his crucifixion.
And it was something that they gave witness to in their preaching and then later in their writing, what we have in the New Testament. Their message was that we have seen the Lord risen from the dead.
And many of those disciples paid for that claim with their lives. And so that is why we can believe Jesus' claim, because he was vindicated through resurrection.
[12:46] Second question is, when was this authority given to him? Jesus is a divine person. We see that in verse 19, where Jesus commissions his disciples to baptize the nations in or into the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

Now, you see there, you'll notice that there's only one name, the name of God. In the Old Testament, it's the name Yahweh, the Lord. And yet there are three who share that name.
It's the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. And of course, the Son is Jesus Christ. He is the Son. So he shares in the divine name, in the divine identity.
He is himself God. And as God, in one sense, he has always ruled. There's no, in one sense, he was never given authority because he's always had authority as God, God the Son.
The one with the divine name, the divine identity. But in Jesus Christ, God came to this world in human form, in human flesh.
[14:10] And so it's now as the one who is both fully God and fully human that he has been given authority. He is now the, both fully God and fully human.

He is the mediator between God and human beings who has completed his mission through his death and resurrection. And as the one who has completed that mission as the mediator, as the, as the savior, as the, as the man Jesus, he has been given all authority in heaven and on earth.
The third question is, what kind of king is he? Maybe the idea of someone claiming to be king over all the nations of the world makes you an easy.
It might sound to you imperialistic and throughout history and today, empire is, well, to say the least, it can be problematic. But this king is radically different from all the other kings and emperors and rulers that world history has thrown up.
We see that in words earlier on in Matthew's gospel in Matthew 20 verses 25 to 28 where we read that Jesus called the disciples to him and said, you know that the rulers of the nations lord it over them and their great ones exercise authority over them.
[15:41] That's, of course, all too familiar. It's the world that we know. Then he says, it shall not be so among you. But whoever would be great among you must be your servant and whoever would be first among you must be your slave even as the son of man came not to be served but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many.

Now when Jesus said these last words about giving his life as a ransom for many, that was still in the future when he said these words in Matthew 20. It was still a prediction but now it has happened.
Jesus has given this ultimate service, this ultimate act for the benefit, for the good of others. He has given his life as a ransom for many.
Jesus is the king whose policy, whose way of ruling is service and self-giving love, of self-sacrificing love, love that is, that seeks the good of the other above his own good, his own interest.
That's the kind of king that Jesus is. He is the king of love. And so, Jesus has all authority in heaven and on earth. His reign is universal.
[17:06] He is the world's true king and lord and rightful lord. And the call of the gospel today to you is to turn to him and to receive him as your king, to recognize and acknowledge him as the true king and lord of all and to give him your allegiance and your trust and your love, your devotion.

And, if you have done that, then, your task is the great commission to go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and the Holy Spirit and teaching them to obey everything that Jesus commands.

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And his promise to you is that he will be with you always to the very end of the age until that time when the earth is filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord Jesus as the waters cover the sea.
Amen. May God bless his word to us. Amen. Amen.

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