

Mission Accomplished

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[0 : 0 0] in a very different setting, a very different part of the world. So let us now turn to God's Word. We're going to read from Revelation.

Remember the call to worship was Matthew 28. Revelation 7 is our text this evening, really, or it's really, I would say, two bookends. Revelation chapter 7, and we're going to read there from verse 9. After this, I looked. And if you remember Revelation, if you think of a theater, if you've ever been to the theater, you go to the theater and you have a curtain that's down. When the house lights dim, the curtain goes up, and you see then what's behind the curtain. The Apostle John is given a glimpse behind the curtain. He's able to see that which is going on and able to see that which lies ahead. And he gives us that same glimpse. So what he sees, we see. What he has experienced, we join in. 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. They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands, and they cried out in a loud voice, salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne and to the Lamb.

All the angels were standing around the throne and around the elders and the four living creatures. They fell down on their faces before the throne and worshiped God saying, Amen, praise and glory and wisdom and thanks and honor and power and strength be to our God forever and ever. Amen. Then one of the elders asked me, these in white robes, who are they and where did they come from? I answered, Sir, you know. And he said, these are they who have come out of the great tribulation.

They have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. Therefore, they are before the throne of God and serve him day and night in his temple. And he who sits on the throne will shelter them with his presence. Never again will they hunger. Never again will they thirst.

The sun will not beat down on them, nor any scorching heat. For the Lamb at the center of the throne will be their shepherd. He will lead them to springs of living water, and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes. Amen. And may God bless to us this reading of his word.

[3 : 1 0] There are some situations that seem so impossible, so improbable. The resources seem so few, the challenges seem so great, as if it were absurd to consider that anything possible could happen, let alone anything approaching success. The call to worship was Matthew chapter 28, which was the Great Commission.

Now, I know that there's a series of films, there used to be a television show, that was entitled Mission Impossible. If there ever was a mission that was impossible, it was this commission that the Lord Jesus gave to his disciples as they were gathered together before his return to heaven. Jesus Christ is telling these eleven that he has a work for them to do. And it's quite simple in its telling, that he says to these people, I want you to make disciples of all the nations. If you know the New Testament, the book of Acts tells us that there were 120 gathered together in prayer at the time of, just after the ascension of Jesus. So you've got the eleven, eleven of the twelve disciples left. You've got 120 believers. And Jesus says, I want you to make this world and its people my disciples. I want you to go to the north. I want you to go to the south. I want you to go to the east. I want you to go to the west.

I want you to go and make disciples of all the nations. How impossible. How challenging. You know, it's scarcely imaginable. Now on a personal level, I'm reminded of an illustration. You know, it's a good illustration that you remember 20 years later. And the preacher was known to many of us, Kenny MacDonald. And he was talking about the challenge of evangelism because the numbers seem so great and the resources seem so few. And I want to, first and foremost this evening, I want to remind us that the key evangelist is not you or me. That's Jesus. He does his work. But he does his work through people like, no, not just people like you and me. He does his people work through you and me.

So Kenny used this illustration. He said the tide along a beach had receded quickly. And the beach was covered in starfish. And the scene must not be Scotland because it was a scorching summer day.

And the tide that receded left these starfish there on the beach to shrivel and to die in the hot noonday sun. And a boy was walking along the beach and he would look, he would stop, bend down, pick up a starfish and throw it back into the sea. And a man was walking in the opposite direction.

[6 : 25] Much wiser, of course, than this small child. And he said to the kid, what are you doing? Kid said, I'm throwing starfish back into the sea. He said, you think you can throw all these starfish back into the sea? Do you think you can make any difference? And the kid said, well, picked up some starfish, threw it back into the sea, made a difference for that one. Now you see, sometimes when we're confronted with something so big, we are tempted to give up without doing anything.

We are tempted to say, not me, not now, not here. This is just too broad of a commission. This is too great of a challenge. We are too few. We are too small. But notice that the commission, though given to people, actually is all about Jesus. He's the speaker and he is the one who speaks with power and with presence. In my experience, I remember we often get visitors in HMP Edinburgh.

We get people that want to come in and speak to the prisoners. And it's a great privilege because you get to meet all different kinds of people from all different kinds of backgrounds. One of the most memorable visitors was a fellow prison chaplain. That might not sound all that exciting. But this chaplain was chaplain in a particular prison. It was called Robben Island. And he was the personal chaplain to one particular prisoner. And that prisoner was a Nobel Peace Prize winner named Nelson Mandela. And the chaplain came in and spoke to the guys. And he said the most common quotation or phrase that Nelson Mandela used was this. It always seems impossible until it is done. So what's Jesus saying? First and foremost in the Great Commission, we often can focus on verse 19, go and make disciples.

But if you focus on verse 19 without 18 or 20, you're going to be lost. Jesus came to them and said, all authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Now when Jesus says all, he means all. He doesn't mean some. He doesn't mean most. He doesn't mean almost all. It means that all authority and power is vested in him. He has plenipotentiary power. There is no one with that kind of power. Every power on earth is by definition limited. President of the United States is often described as the most powerful person on the planet. Yes and no. That person's power is limited. Four years, eight years, presidents eventually die. The power and authority that Jesus has is what he says it is. It is absolutely unlimited. So unlimited power, unlimited authority vested in one person and not only do we have power, but we have a character here that is remarkable. I think it was Lord Acton, the historian in the 19th century who famously said, power corrupts. Absolute power corrupts absolutely. Yes, with one exception.

Jesus Christ has absolute power and absolute authority and his character is absolutely conformed to the character of God because he is God. There is nothing in his exercise of power that in any way contradicts or conflicts with his character and with his nature. So ultimate power, ultimate authority and notice in verse 20, teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always to the very end of the age.

[10 : 32] So this is the sandwich around which circles the commission that's given to God's people. The power of God in Christ Jesus our Lord and the presence of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Powerful and present. So therefore we never do anything alone. So this evening I'm speaking right now and in a sense it feels very much isolated.

I'm doing something and you're listening but I'm told that if I am presenting God's word that he accompanies the proclamation of his word with his presence, with his blessing and with his promise so that what I appear to be doing on my own, I do not do on my own, not my own wisdom, not my own strength, not my own message.

And that's a wonderful encouragement. So whether you go out with the caravan on a Tuesday night, whether you share the gospel with your friend over a cup of coffee, whether you invite a friend to church, whatever it might be, you never serve alone. You never serve in your strength.

You never serve with your power or with your authority. So Matthew chapter 28, this great commission, make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

[11 : 59] Now statistics are difficult. But what I've heard and what I think to be true is the first 19 centuries of the Christian church, first 1900 years, the Christian church had approximately 2.5% of the world's population.

Now 2.5% is a small percentage but if you're dealing with a big number, it's still a big number of people. So 19 centuries to get 2.5%. I'm told that it took only 70 years to double that from 1900 to 1970 and probably another 30 years to double that.

Missiologists think roughly that we're dealing with 12.5% to 15% of the world's population is Christian today. Again, big numbers, growing numbers.

But it gives you a sense that this impossible mission is being fulfilled in our day and in our age even if we don't see it.

Even if we don't perceive it. You see, God is faithful. He's faithful to his word. He's faithful to his promise. And what he plans and purposes, he delivers.

[13 : 24] So the Great Commission, Matthew 28, is mission impossible. And we turned to Revelation chapter 7 very briefly. Mission accomplished.

Verse 9, Go and make disciples of all the nations.

What is a disciple? A disciple is a learner. Jesus is the teacher. A disciple is a worshiper. Jesus is the object of worship. And what do we see in glory? We see a multitude.

And it's so big that we can't count. I've worked in an accounting firm. I've dealt with large numbers. There are people who deal with very large budgets.

Budgets that have eight zeros or nine zeros or ten zeros. So there's big numbers out there, people. And we're told that the number of those that are in heaven are so multitude, so many, that they cannot be counted.

[14 : 36] And notice the diversity. Every nation. Every tribe. Every people. Every language. Mission accomplished.

John wants us to see that the commission will one day be fully and completely accomplished. Yes, through the instruments of you and me, God's people.

The prayers that we pray. The words that we speak. The money that we give. Yes. But ultimately, the one who gave the commission is the one that guarantees the commission.

The one with all power and authority in heaven on earth. And the one who is present now until the end of the age will be present at the end of the age. And he will be the object of worship.

And he will be the object of praise. And notice that the diversity is there. And I love this because it's hard. When we look at the world, when it says, go and make disciples of all the nations.

[15 : 40] Do we think of political states? Do we think of members of the United Nations? Do we think of those countries that send people to the Olympics? Because those numbers are relatively small.

Roughly 200-ish nation states that exist. Or do we think of much smaller units? There are about 16,000 or 17,000 people groups in the world.

And I think what we have here is a much more diverse number. Because it's not just, let's say, the nation of India or Brazil. These large nations that contain many indigenous people groups.

But it seems as if every language group is represented. It seems as if every tribe is represented. It seems as if every people group is represented. So that it can be said that in those places in the world today where Jesus is not known, he will be known.

And those places and tribes and language groups in this world where Jesus is not yet worshipped, he will be worshipped. Hudson Taylor, the great missionary pioneer to China.

[16 : 49] He said there are three stages to every great work of God. First, it is impossible. Then, it is difficult. Then, it is done. Taylor had a vision of reaching China.

And when he embarked and eventually founded the China Inland Mission, there was work. Work had been done in China. A very early Christian missionary, Robert Morrison of Canton, had established a Chinese-English dictionary.

He had translated the New and the Old Testament into Chinese. And there were outposts, particularly along the coasts. But there was very little work inland. So, China Inland Mission.

By the time of 1949, when a political change of significant magnitude occurred in the nation of China, it was estimated that there were one million Chinese believers.

Now, the rationale of a new regime was Christianity is a Western religion. Christianity is funded by the West. And Christianity is propagated by Western leaders.

[17 : 58] Let's get rid of the Western missionaries. Let's get rid of the Western organizations. And we'll get rid of the Western religion. And, in a sense, it worked. Because a church of one million Chinese believers in 1949 no longer exists.

It seems that the Chinese people are far better at evangelizing Chinese people than Westerners were. And the church of one million is probably a hundred.

It's impossible to estimate. But a hundred million? More than a hundred million? You see, God has a way of using adverse circumstances to his advantage. Doesn't seem to make sense, does it?

Get rid of the money. Get rid of the missionaries. Get rid of the organization. Get rid of the church. Get rid of the Christian faith. And, actually, that's a catalyst for multiplication. God has a way of doing strange things in strange ways to achieve his perfect purposes.

And notice that not only is there a number there, a huge number, but notice what isn't there. And this comes at the end of the passage. This is just really a whistle-stop tour because I could spend much more time on every part of Revelation chapter 7.

[19 : 11] Notice who's there. Great multitude, every language, nation, tribe, and tongue. But notice what isn't there. Verse 16.

Never again will they hunger. Never again will they thirst. The sun will not beat down on them, nor any scorching heat.

For the Lamb at the center of the throne will be their shepherd. He will lead them to springs of living water. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.

In this world, there are those who have no shelter. Those who have no food. Those who have no sustainable source of water.

Those who are exposed to the elements. Those who have danger and tears at every turn. On that day, the tears will be wiped away.

[20 : 11] On that day, the scorching sun will no longer beat. On that day, the hunger and the thirst will disappear. Why? Because they are in the presence of the one who is the source of springs of living water.

In a previous generation, God raised up a group of preachers who were on fire. They were called enthusiasts.

And that term, enthusiast, was not a compliment. And enthusiasts for religion seemed to be a bit low class. That's not what you expected. You expected something somber.

You expected something measured. And these enthusiasts, by and large, were barred from the churches of that time. You see, the religious authorities said, these men get a bit too excited when they preach.

These men preach to a congregation and ask them to, and command them to be born again. It wasn't very seemly. So the best way of kind of finishing or stifling this movement was, well, the only place where you can preach, of course, is in a pulpit.

[21 : 27] So if you cut the pulpits off from people like George Whitefield and John Wesley, then this movement will quickly come to an end. Yes and no. It didn't come to an end.

It actually was multiplied because these men felt if we cannot preach in church, well, there's large parks in London. They're filled with people. Let's go there.

The first time George Whitefield preached in the open air, this was the journal note that he had on the 29th of April. Preached in the morning at Moorfields to an exceeding great multitude.

Being weakened by my morning's preaching in the afternoon, I refreshed myself with a little sleep. That's the one thing that George Whitefield and I shared. I refreshed myself this afternoon with the same remedy.

And at five went and preached at Kennington Common, about two miles from London, where no less than 30,000 people were supposed to be present. The wind being for me carried the voice to the extremist part of the audience.

[22 : 26] All stood attentive and joined in the psalm and the Lord's prayer most regularly. I scarce ever preached more quietly in any church. The word came with power.

The people were much affected and expressed their love to me in many ways. All agreed it was never seen on this wise before. Oh, what need have all God's people to rejoice and give thanks.

I hope a good inroad has been made into the devil's kingdom today. It always seems impossible, Nelson Mandela said, until it's done.

These men were dangerous. You cut the pulpit off from them and four or five hundred people would be limited in their ability to hear Wesley or to hear Whitefield. But what God had in store was much bigger.

Whatever our plans are, God's plans are bigger. Whatever our vision is, God's vision is bigger. And we are reminded in Revelation 7 as we are reminded in Matthew chapter 28.

[23 : 26] God has a plan and a purpose for all the nations, all the tribes, and all the tongues. And he has a 100% success rate.

What he purposes, he achieves. What he plans, he accomplishes because of who he is. Isn't it a great privilege that he calls people like us, he calls us in that service.

And when we pray, and when we serve, and when we speak, and when we give, we are a small part of a big plan. And a big plan that is guaranteed success.

Mission impossible became mission accomplished. Amen. We are now going to sing the Psalm 84.

And we're going to sing that together. I've mentioned that at the, I'm going to pray briefly after we sing. And I'll... ..

[24 : 36]