

The great commission

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[0:00] A few verses in Matthew 28, and really we're just going to dip into them. I think that's as much as I would claim for this evening.

! So this is the bit, chapter 28, verse 16, Then the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus has told them to go. So it's that little bit there. We've seen the risen Christ, that he's been met, and he has referred them onwards to a future meeting back up north in Galilee where everything began.

And that's where Matthew takes us in verse 16 and onwards. So I was trying to think of a metaphor for this ending.

So your taste in music is different to mine, but I was watching a while ago now some rock bands performing at Glastonbury. And it is a typical thing, you might have to believe me on this, for a rock band when they come to the end of a really anthemic piece of music and there's a chord at the end where the guitarist goes mad and the drummer goes mad and everything builds up and they go boom like that and finish like that and the guitarist usually jumps up in the air and as he falls to the ground everything stops and there's this huge way of finishing a piece of music.

You may not have seen it, you may have. You may have even participated in such a thing. But it is a really impressive way to end a piece of music.

[1:44] And this is a really impressive end to the gospel. It is a sort of the final chord which makes, which resolves everything or almost everything.

So you could say, one of the commentaries I was looking at was saying you could almost think that the whole point of Matthew's gospel is to get us to these few verses.

That you could almost say everything in the gospel leads to these verses and is resolved in these verses. Every thread that you have in the gospel links up to these last few words.

And I think there's a lot to be said for that. It's like this closing chord. Here all the threads link up.

And it is these words are the springboard for the age in which we now live in.

So the age of going to the temple, the age of Jerusalem being God's headquarters on earth, all that is closing extremely rapidly.

[2:53] But the age in which the promises about Jerusalem, that all nations will stream to it, the promises about God's purposes and the king being king over everything, that's now number one thing on the agenda.

And that's the springboard for this new age. And the next thing that is on the agenda is his return, which the Bible talks about as his coming. He's coming into power.

He's coming into hands-on, kingly recognition. So that's how important these verses are.

And let's just make a few comments on them as we go through. So first of all, verse 16, the 11 disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had told them to go.

So we notice that this is based in some sense in Galilee. Galilee is a theme in Matthew's gospel.

[4:02] When the crowd said, who is this person coming in on the donkey, do you remember what the reply was? Do I remember what the reply was?

Is Jesus the prophet from Galilee or from Nazareth? From Nazareth in Galilee, the crowd said, this is Jesus the prophet from Nazareth in Galilee. And it's worth trying to get a little grip of what Galilee was like.

It's not the sophisticated Jewish center of culture and religion. That was Jerusalem. And by and large, Jerusalem was pretty hostile to Jesus.

Galilee, you have to make a trek to get there. It's a little sort of area on its own. It's not a very highly respected area. If you think of the history of the nations, the northern kingdom, you remember, was

taken into exile and it was repopulated with all sorts of random people.

They had a strange accent. You can still find Jewish jokes about people from Galilee. I mean, old Jewish jokes, not modern Jewish jokes, but they still have jokes.

[5:26] You can find them recorded about their rough accents. They were unsophisticated. And by the cultured people of Jerusalem, they were despised.

And this is one of the threads of the gospel. He will be called a Nazarene. Remember that? That's what Jesus is called.

He's called one of those people from up there in Galilee, a Nazarene. And Galilee itself is referred to, remember, we'll go back in the beginning of Matthew's gospel, because as I said, things that are mentioned earlier on all come to a focus later on.

In Matthew, what have I got? I put 4.12. Yes. This is when Jesus began his ministry, and it was in fulfillment, Matthew 4.12 and onwards, it was in fulfillment of what the prophet said, land of Zebulun, land of Naphtali, the way of the sea along the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles, the people living in darkness have seen a great light, and those living in the land of the shadow of death, a light has dawned.

It's actually referred to as Galilee of the Gentiles. Where does that quote come from? It does come from Isaiah. Yes, that's correct. It's interesting that, as Matthew puts it, the center of Jesus' operations is not going to aim for Jerusalem, the center of culture and sophistication and religious power.

[7:13] He's going to work from a different base. I think that's worth taking a bit of encouragement from in our sort of rapidly post-Christian age, the age in which the Christian church could claim to say, we are the establishment.

England is a Christian country by law, by practice, in actual reality. People take different views on this.

If we were in Northern Ireland, people would take a very different view on this. But I think where we are, we would say those days are gone. Our council here, I think they probably have prayers before the council meeting, but I doubt very much whether the councillors think that anything particularly relevant has happened.

And you might say that Brighton is a particularly detrimental example, but I think with the example of where the rest of the country is going as the years go by.

But we take comfort from the fact that Jesus never said, oh, we've got to be in the center of power. We've got to be the people who rule in the houses of parliament, et cetera.

[8:37] He said, I'm perfectly capable of building my kingdom from a marginal position, from an outlying position. I don't depend on having legislative power.

My kingdom works in a different way. Maybe a point for discussion, but I think it's relevant that Jesus went to Galilee to start this off.

Next thing I'd like us to notice is in, well, in verse 17, it says they worshiped Jesus, but some were bewildered or something like that, didn't know what to make of it.

Then Jesus came to them and said, now this is noteworthy, all authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.

So this is one of the alls. There are four alls, all authority, all nations, all things I've commanded, all days.

[9:41] So this all is the all of all authority. Now this is a very strong thread that's been going through the gospel. The question of his kingly rule, the question of his kingly rule and the question of its reality, the question of its extent, the question of its progress in time.

And in a moment, we'll pick up that thread. But I invite you to look at the last book of the Bible, the last book of the Old Testament. Now you might be turning to Malachi, but when the Jewish Bible was put together, the way they put it together, so I'm reliably told, was that 2 Chronicles was the last book in the Bible.

So if you're not that good at finding where Chronicles is, and I'm not that good at finding it, don't worry, I'll read it to you. Last book in the Old Testament, this is where the Old Testament finishes, is

of a king talking about his kingdom and his authority and how people should move in response to that.

2 Chronicles, chapter 36, verse 23. This is the last words of the Jewish Bible. This is what Cyrus, king of Persia, says, The Lord, the God of heaven, has given me all the kingdoms of the earth and he has appointed me to build a temple for him at Jerusalem in Judah.

Any one of his people among you, may the Lord his God be with him and let him go up. It's just interesting, isn't it, that the Jewish Bible ended with a claim to all the kingdoms of the earth a prayer that God would be with his people and sort of marching orders to go and get on with the next thing, which in that case was the rebuilding of the temple.

[11:53] So in the order of the way the books were put together, I'm reliably told, that was the last words in the Old Testament. Now we have these words from Jesus in the New Testament and of course he says the same thing, multiplied many, many times.

He says all authority, all authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me and he makes a promise of being with his people.

I am with you always and he gives marching orders to go and make disciples. So it's just an interesting comparison. But let's follow the thread that I mentioned earlier, which is the thread of Jesus' kingship.

So this too starts off at the beginning of the Gospel where in Matthew 2 verse 2 the wise men, the magi, come and they ask, do you remember the question that they ask?

Where is he born king of the Jews? Where is the king? Where is he who is born king of the Jews? And that kingship is referred to, sometimes referred to in mockery, so 2711.

[13:13] The governor, Pilate, says to Jesus, is this who you are?

Are you the king of the Jews? Remember that in verse 29, Matthew 27, 29, the soldiers take it upon themselves to clothe Jesus as if he were a king with a scarlet robe and a crown of thorns to smash him on the head and bow down in mock worship and say, hail king of the Jews.

And you remember that in verse 37, the charge above the cross of Jesus was, this is Jesus, the king of the Jews.

And whether Pilate had ordered that there out of irony or out of mockery, if this is the best specimen of Jewish nobility, then it's a pretty poor state.

This is the king of the Jews. Or what? I mean, there's probably a number of things were going on. But that was the claim that was mocked.

[14:30] But this is the claim that Jesus had always promised would be fulfilled. And there's a load of references there. For example, 1341, which says, the kingdom of heaven is like this.

The son of man, verse 41, will send out his angels. They will weed out of his kingdom everything that causes sin and all who do evil.

They will throw them into the fiery furnace where they'll be weeping and gnashing of teeth. Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their father. He who has ears, let him hear.

Which is a rather grand vision, isn't it? Of what the son of man will achieve. He will send out his angels. They will weed out of his kingdom everything that is evil.

then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their fathers. It envisages Jesus' kingship truly universally established.

[15:45] And there are several verses like that. I think we've got time to look at a couple more. For example, 1628, where Jesus looks well ahead and promises 16, Matthew 16, 27, the son of man is going to come in his father's glory with his angels and he will reward each person according to what he has done.

I tell you the truth, some who are standing here will not taste death before they see the son of man coming in his kingdom. Which I think refers to the transfiguration which happens straight afterwards.

But it's a promise of the son of man having a great kingdom that he will come with his glory and will reward each person according to what he's done.

Let's zoom on to, I think, 25, yeah, 2531. which is another of these promises of the king in his kingdom and he says this, this is Jesus speaking about himself, Matthew 25, 31, when the son of

man comes in his kingdom and all the angels with him, he will sit on his throne in heavenly glory, all the nations will be gathered before him, he will separate the people from one another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats right and the goats on his left, then the king will say to those on his right, come you who are blessed by my father, inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world.

and it's quite a long parable but you can see the point of it that Jesus is saying the end of the world the king will sit upon his throne and he will judge all the nations and this king is Jesus and throughout the gospel these promises continue to be made and Jesus continues to teach along this line and we ought to look back to Daniel chapter 7 because this is one of the classic sources of these thoughts and visions and promises Daniel chapter 7 verse 13 so we've gone way back to Daniel Daniel is looking forward in a visionary sense to what the future will be and this is one of the things that he sees

[18:41] Daniel chapter 7 verse 13 in my vision at night I looked and there before me was one like a son of man coming with the clouds of heaven he approached the ancient of days and was led into his presence he was given authority glory and sovereign power all peoples nations men of every language worshipped him his dominion is an everlasting dominion that will not pass away and his kingdom is one that will never be destroyed and without trying to confuse you with lots and lots of words that's a very important thing that's being said there Daniel was seeing this in the midst of political turbulence one power up against another power he was right in the centre of all that and what he sees is a vision it is a vision of someone like a son of man a human being and this person comes into power they come into the presence of God the ancient of days and this human is treated as divinity the amount of glory that he's given he is given authority glory power and all nations all peoples men of every language worship him his dominion is an everlasting dominion that will not his kingdom is one that can never be destroyed and you see the point that

Jesus keeps on referring to this sort of thing the son of man will come into his glory all through his life this is the thing that's challenged you're the king of the Jews how can you be the king if you're suffering on the cross how can you be the king if you're being beaten up and spat on but he holds on to this this is what will be the son of man will be given that glory and all nations will worship him people yeah all different nations and languages and in the bit that we're looking at in Matthew's gospel I think it's pretty clear that Jesus is saying this is fulfilled the words aren't totally exactly the same but they're very close to it aren't they he says here

I am I died on the cross I'm risen from the dead all authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me now there's still unfinished business because all the nations don't yet worship him but that's what Jesus sets about to be done now is the sending out of my messengers so that one day the lamb will be upon the throne and he'll be surrounded thousands upon thousands from every tongue and nation and language and they'll be giving honour to the lamb upon the throne that's where we're headed with this but Jesus says all authority and in heaven and earth I've already got that that's mine now and this is the basis on which he says all the other things

I've got that authority! no doubt about my kingly power now the resurrected Christ is the kingly Christ he is the ruling Christ so let's go on to see what he says on the basis of this verse 19 so since I have all this authority and power you go and make disciples of all nations so I just remind us that this word go has cropped up several times you might like to look through with a pencil that you can rub out if you get it wrong but there's quite a lot of commanding to go go go quickly and here Jesus says your job now is to go and make disciples of all nations a disciple is somebody who hears and believes and follows and obeys that's what a disciple is it isn't just somebody who hears lots of people heard but they weren't disciples it isn't just somebody who only says they believe because Jesus is looking for people who believe it to the point that they'll do something about it because otherwise believing is not really doesn't really mean very much does it the disciples typically Jesus said to his disciples leave your nets follow me follow me I will make you fishers of men that's what discipleship looked like in the beginning of Matthew and it was confined to those particularly to the fishermen and then to people who subsequently followed him and now Jesus says take that thought

and apply it to everybody go into all the world don't not just fishermen certainly not just Jewish people but people in the supermarket where you go to people in the jungle people in the desert people in the mega cities make disciples of all of them this is the fulfillment of the

[25:16] Isaiah 2 idea isn't it behold the mountain of the Lord's house will be established as chief among the mountains and all the nations will flow to it this is what Jesus is saying make disciples of all nations and Christians call that mission they call it missionary work but I think Jesus is saying quite clearly here you my disciples have a mission you have a purpose you have a task you have instructions which is to go and make disciples I'll come back to that in a moment but it is what he says and we are to take that on board he doesn't say stay where you are everything is going to be fine he does say go and make disciples that's actually our standing orders and if you like that's what being a church member is about it's saying

I identify with this mission I'm not going to do it all over the place that's what this church is doing we are particularly a mission to Brighton apparently not that many people want to go on a mission to Brighton but we're here so we might as well go on a mission to Brighton and we're seeking to make disciples of people here that's what we're doing isn't it yeah that is what we're doing and he is a bit specific about it he says baptizing them so again we go back to things that were already in the gospel so there was baptizing right back in the beginning wasn't there John the Baptist was baptizing people John the Baptist baptized people who were Jewish and they were saying we want to take this seriously we want to be ready for the Messiah we want to be ready for Lord we our lives aren't right we want to clean them up we want to turn back want to express that we want to be washed cleansed powerfully spiritually we'll dip into water to express that and that was what John the Baptist did and now we come back to the end of the gospel and Jesus says take that thought expand it and do it to as many people as will be believers so take that disciple making baptizing go and do that to all nations it's finding people who say I'm dirty I need a deep cleansing wash and I do that as it says here in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit and I'm not going to stop on this but this is actually Trinitarian theology so thank you Katie for praying so often to the triune God the triune God is the God who is three and who is one and it is one name the name of the Father and of the

Son and of the Holy Spirit there's one God one name and three persons we won't stop on that but it's a significant thing it's a big thing to suddenly say this is who God is this is who the God of Israel is he is father he is the son he is the Holy Spirit complete radicalization of understanding of who the Lord the God of Israel has always been so they are baptized in the name of the Lord beginning their lives in God and it says going on by teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you so again we could take all the things that have been going on in the gospel earlier on for example the sermon on the mount where Jesus says I'm going to teach you how you live in the kingdom you've heard it said that you love your friends and hate your enemies well

I'm going to say you love your enemies and Jesus is going to take the things that were taught in the old testament and every single thing is going to deepen make more radical and fulfill fill it with its full meaning and say that's how to live in the kingdom and of course he said those things to his Jewish disciples and now Jesus is going to say well you go to everybody and you teach them the way to live in the kingdom clearly you're not teaching them how to be Jews you're going to deepen everything you know Jews had their food laws and Jesus says that's we deepen that through to living for God in every way and he says I want you to go and teach people to live for me teaching them to obey everything I've commanded you just point out he does talk about keeping the things that he said and

[31:03] I refer back to what he says right at the end of the sermon on the mount you remember the it's a wonderful children's thing isn't it the man who built his house on the rock the wise man built his house upon the rock how does it go after that house upon the rock came tumbling we're going to do this now okay in case you weren't sure about it there was the man who built his house on the sand you've seen those pictures of Hemsby where the FIC conference was those poor people whose houses were built on sand and they were now tipping over the cliff it was just a couple of

weeks ago wasn't it Helmsby yeah Hemsby Hemsby let's not go to that so people do build their houses on sand and they do fall over the wise man built his house on the rock now we have to get straight what Jesus is referring to because it's quite tempting to say that the rock is

Jesus because quite often that is the correct answer but in this case Jesus says this is a man who hears my word and this is a man who hears my word this is a man who hears my word but doesn't do it this is the man who hears my word but does do it the difference is whether they do what he says that's what the difference is between the wise man and the foolish man so this that Jesus says teaching them to obey everything I have commanded means what it says he's looking for disciples who will put into practice what he says it's not the same thing as getting people to do everything that we think they ought to do because sometimes it's just us but the things that Jesus says they should do need to be taught and they need to do those so we need to disciple people we need to be trained and to train one another and to train one another up in living the Christian life how does a kingdom person live life in employment what is a

Christian attitude to employment how does a Christian live in terms of money what do we do with money answer is we make a deliberate and systematic attempt to give it away that's what disciples do how do we live in family life we husbands are to love their wives as Christ loved the church wives are to submit to their husbands as Christ does as the church does to Christ we're to bring up our children in the fear and nurture of the Lord children are to obey their parents how do we make decisions in life we seek the wisdom of the Lord and there's all sorts of teaching about that how do we relate to people we relate to people in a Christian way let your yes be yes and your no be no treat other people as you would have them treat you how do we use our time we invest our time realising as Jesus says that we just have so much time and there is a world to come to make sense of how we use time now all those sorts of things teaching them to obey the things

I've commanded you that was a lot of words does that make sense last thing surely I am with you all days always to the end of the age and there's a behold in there behold I'm with you the enabling personal presence of the divine saviour we were told right back at the beginning that his name would be Emmanuel which means God with us and at the end of this we find the promise I am with you which is a brilliant promise isn't it God with us even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death I shall fear no evil for thou art with me thy rod and thy staff they comfort me that is such a precious thing to God's people isn't it even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death

I fear no evil because you are with me Hebrews 13 verse 5 we have this promise never will I leave you never will I forsake you and interestingly in Hebrews 13 5 he applies it in terms of money he says keep your lives free from the love of money be content with what you have for he has said never will I leave you never will I forsake you so that God the promise of his presence is a very powerful and precious thing do you know that I don't know what you call it story thing of the two sets of footprints I all know it I won't bother them but that's that's a fair enough thing isn't it two sets of footprints my footprints the

[37:11] Lord's footprints looking back some one place there's only one set of footprints Lord why did you leave me answer I didn't leave you that's the part of life I carried you I am with you always the other gospels would put that presence in terms of the Holy Spirit which is how you could elaborate on that but please notice that the presence here is not put related to money or difficult times but it's related to spreading the gospel go into all the world make disciples I'm with you and perhaps we could link it with John's reference to the Holy Spirit he will convict the world of sin and righteousness and judgment because as we go to make disciples we cannot do that on our own it is just not doable it's not within us to do that

God will use us but he does the part that we can't do only he can whisper inside somebody's soul this is true only he can whisper inside somebody's soul you wrong you got it wrong you're out of order you need to confess your sin only he can do that and this is the promise of the presence of the Lord in that therefore he says go surely I'm with you always to the end of the age and I suppose the go is the operative word it's the unfinished business and I think we ought to feel the weight of that he does say go so he doesn't say sit still and wait for other people to come to you does actually

say go so we don't need further instructions

Jesus has already said go into all the world and make disciples we don't have to wait for any further instructions go that's okay go we don't need anyone else's permission don't need anyone else's permission we don't need to make sure that the government agree with us on this we go anyway the early Christians did not have sort of government approval in some cases they were subversive they didn't go looking for trouble they didn't go deliberately provocative but they went anyway the reason being that the king of kings has told us to go all authority in heaven and earth is given to me says Jesus therefore go so we don't need anyone else's permission and I trust that by his grace we've got that we might not be as good at it as we would like to be but we do hear these words go and

I trust we're saying yes Lord just show me how show me what step to take I'm ready to do that show me who to go to show me what what door is open might be just a tiny little door might be just a word but I'm ready to go that applies across the board we're all to obey the things that he commanded so we go and as a church it's one of the things we promised in church membership that will keep the church going not just ticking over going but going out faithful in making the gospel known so many things to think about and so many things to pray about but we really really must not forget what our mission is from the risen saviour to go and make disciples of all nations let's sing one of those songs