

The King's Authority

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Please consider donating to this work in the San Francisco Bay Area online at ChristChurchEastBay.org. Today's scripture is from the Gospel of Matthew, chapter 28, verses 16 through 20.

Then the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had told them to go. 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 Gospel of the Lord. Praise to you, O Christ.

[1 : 23] Wow, that was awesome, Joan. I gotta get you to read my books on Audible. We love you. Good morning, everyone. My name's Andrew. I'm one of the pastors here.

It's a little bit longer of a sermon today. I'm sorry I didn't have time to cut it down as much as I normally do. It's been a rough week for me. Our kitchen faucet sink broke. I was involved in a hit and run.

I didn't hit them. I got hit. They ran. And then the Warriors lost last night, so I'm not feeling it. But I'm glad to bring God's Word to you.

We're closing out our series in the Gospel of Matthew. But before we do that, let's go ahead and come to the Lord in prayer. Father, we want to hear from you.

We want to be filled with this resurrection life. And we so want to be the church that you've called us to be, filled with this resurrection spirit. Would you make that happen, God?

[2 : 22] The preaching of your Word and the fellowship that's here, the prayers and the singing. When we meet you at the table, would you nourish us, fill us, and make us what you want us to be?

For our sake and for your glory, we pray. In Jesus' name. Amen. So, you know, as a pastor, I often get asked for, like, life advice and counsel.

It's kind of crazy, but that's what happens. It comes with the territory. And, I mean, just this week I was walking with someone and they asked me, you know, I just started dating, but how do I know when we're ready to take the next step?

You know, I ask these kinds of questions all the time. And I'm super honored that people come to me with these kinds of questions and I try to respond like a calm and collected, confident, you know, unflappable, super wise sage.

But if I'm honest, when some of you ask me, you know, should I take this job or that one? Should I move here or there? Should I date or marry this person or that? What is God's will for my life?

[3 : 20] And how do I know for sure? Like, honestly, I pretty much never really know. All right? Like, how each and every one of you ought to live your lives in the specific details and decisions that confront you.

Most of the time, I don't know any more than you do. I can't tell you to pursue, you know, academia with your PhD versus a job in the industry. I can't tell you whether or not you should buy that house there or when you should buy it.

But what I can tell you and what I will always try to tell you is what God's revealed will is for all of us and what God's commanded us. So, for example, I was just walking with, like, a newly engaged bachelor just a couple months ago.

He's trying to consider, discern a new career path. And I couldn't definitively, like, tell him, though, to leave his job in education and to pursue tech or healthcare or something like that.

But while I couldn't tell him to pursue this or that career, thus saith the Lord, what I could remind him of is what the Lord has said, right? The greatest commandment.

[4 : 22] What does Jesus say? The greatest commandment. To love the Lord our God with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength. And to love our neighbors as ourselves. And so, while I couldn't say, you know, be a teacher, not a tech bro, thus saith the Lord, no.

My counsel to this bachelor was, on which path do you think you could better love God and better love your neighbors? See, I try to remind people of the clear commands of God that should orient all of our life decisions.

And we're going to look at one of those big commandments that ought to orient our entire life today. This Sunday after Easter, we're closing out, again, our sermon series in the Gospel account of Matthew. We're looking at this huge command from the risen Christ, what many call the Great Commission.

The Great Commission here at the end of Matthew's Gospel account. It's what the risen Christ tells to the New Covenant church. His last words to them before He ascends to the Father. Verse 18, Go and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit and teaching them to obey all that I've commanded you.

Again, the Great Commission is this mission, this specific task that Jesus commanded and set His church to fulfill. To go and make disciples of all the nations. That's what the church is here to do.

[5 : 36] That's what the church is here to do. The church is here to make disciples. And you know, we can go and serve the poor, but we can also serve the poor without making disciples. The thing is, we cannot make disciples without going to serve the poor.

Do you understand that distinction? The church is here to make disciples of nations. That is our primary task. And the simple question for all of us here who claim to be Christians, who claim to be followers of Jesus Christ is, how are we going to do this?

Both individually and collectively, how are we going to fulfill Jesus' Great Commission commandment? And how are we going to make disciples of all the nations? And what is each and every one of our roles in this massive undertaking?

That's the question for the Christians in the room. But you know, even before we ask that question, maybe you're here today and you haven't decided to follow Jesus. Maybe you're here and you're skeptical of His claim in verse 18 that all authority in heaven and on earth have been given unto Him.

And I have a question for you too. Because like, sure, you don't have to be a disciple of Jesus if you don't want to. And you certainly don't have to make disciples of Jesus among the nations as He commanded His church to do.

[6 : 43] But my question for you is then, who or what are you following? And if not making disciples of Jesus, what have you given your life to making? You see, if we're all honest with ourselves, we're actually all disciples of someone or something.

And even in our you-do-you-I-won't-judge culture, we are actually all far more engaged in making disciples than I think we realize. And maybe you're like, what are you talking about?

I'm no disciple and I'm certainly not making disciples. I'm just doing me. I'm just living my life. And I have no interest in telling other people how they ought to live. No interest in imposing my way of life on others.

But don't you see? Even that way of thinking, even that way of living, actually demonstrates who you are a disciple of. You're a disciple of the Western school of self-expressive individualism.

You're a product of the European Enlightenment, a student of Western liberal thought. You are a disciple. No matter what you think, we're all disciples. And I mean, even your supposedly unimposing, you know, you-do-you approach to others, don't you see that that too is a form of discipling others?

[7 : 56] Think about it. You-do-you, it's still a command. It's a way of life that you're commending to others. Come and follow me, you say, right? Come follow me as I do me and you-do-you.

That's still discipleship. That's still discipleship. Because see, really, a disciple is simply a follower. A follower, a learner, an adherent, someone who follows a teacher or follows an influencer, if you like.

Someone who follows someone and their way of life. I mean, just show me your Twitter feeds, right? Show me your Instagram. Show me your TikTok. And tell me with a straight face that you are not a follower, that you are not a disciple.

Following, you know, that fitness influencer, that mommy influencer, that mental health influencer, maybe your favorite journalist or podcaster. And then maybe for those of you who are not millennials and are not social media followers, who do you follow in the New York Times or in the Wall Street Journal?

Who's your favorite columnist? Maybe you're a disciple of Nike or Anthropology or The Gap or Lululemon or Ikea or Costco. That's probably me, right? And your lifestyle, your consumer habits are way more determined for you than by you.

[9 : 07] Honestly, none of us is as original as we like to think. We all need to be real with that. We all need to accept that. And we all need to be more conscious of who and what we're following and why.

Because you see, being a follower, being a disciple isn't necessarily a bad thing. We were made to be disciples, followers, learners, adherents. That's how the Creator made His creatures. God made us to be and to make disciples in His image and not in our own image.

When He said, be fruitful, multiply, fill the earth, He wanted us to multiply disciples. He wanted us to multiply the image of God across all the earth. So another way we could put the question of who is it that's discipling us is whose image are we seeking to be formed and conformed unto?

What image are we aspiring to live up to and look like? Is it the image of God? Or is it the image of something else? And if it's something else, is it actually a better image?

A better image than the image of the invisible God, Jesus Christ. And maybe you're like, heck yeah, it's better. I don't want to be in the image of Jesus Christ, the crucified Christ.

[10 : 18] But what I would say to that is, you know, you can avoid following a crucified Christ, but you cannot avoid the eventual death, judgment, and shame of His cross.

And no one you follow can ultimately deliver you from that but the crucified and risen Christ. So you can avoid discipleship under the crucified Christ, but what other discipleship tracks lead to resurrection life?

CrossFit and orange theory is discipleship. And that discipleship might prolong your life, but it cannot save your life. Lifestyle, influencer, Instagram, discipleship might beautify your life, but it cannot save your life.

Positive psychology, therapeutic, mental health, discipleship might comfort your life, but it cannot save your life. So again, none of us can escape it.

We are all disciples of something or someone. We're all following some way of life. And Jesus would remind us today that He alone is the way. He alone is the truth.

[11 : 23] And He alone is the life, the way to live and pattern our lifestyles after the truth to trust, the true image of God to conform our lives to. And He's the very life Himself, the conqueror of death, and His tomb is empty.

So now with this second part of the sermon, what I want to do is I want to pay closer attention to our text here, and here's the big idea. Jonathan St. Clair style, right? The risen Messiah leaves His faltering followers with a commission and a comfort.

The risen Messiah leaves His faltering followers with a commission and a comfort. So let's start with the risen Messiah and His faltering followers. I should have chosen a better word.

So remember the context. The context for this passage is that the tomb is empty, Christ is risen, and He's told His disciples to meet back up with Him in Galilee where they had so many of their adventures, right?

All the memories in Galilee. So verse 16 says, Then the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had told them to go. And then look what it says in verse 17, and I love how Joan Benton accented this part.

[12 : 26] When they saw Him, they worshipped Him, but some doubted. Right, Joan? But some doubted. And that's an interesting response, right? It's a very interesting response.

And the first thing I want to say about this is that, you know, just like the women being the first eyewitnesses of the resurrection, this is another example from these historical gospel accounts where if it didn't actually happen, the writers would not have made this up.

Like, why would you record how the very disciples Christ commanded to found His very church, why would you mention their doubt? Why not just mention their worship? The only reason would be that this is simply what happened.

The scriptures, the scriptures, Christianity, we keep it real, all right? And you know, the more conservative commentators I read this week, they tried to suggest that the some who doubted were actually not the eleven, but maybe some people in Jesus' wider entourage of disciples perhaps still traumatized from the emotional rollercoaster of seeing, you know, their Messiah arrested and beaten and bruised and crucified and buried.

And you know, perhaps, that is a plausible interpretation, but I'm not quite sure that I'm convinced of that interpretation, if I'm honest with you. See, to the conservative commentators, they just think you cannot both worship and doubt.

[13 : 47] They think that like, worship and doubt, or like faith and doubt, are completely incompatible and at odds. And I want to be careful here because I think there's some truth to this. Like, worship and unbelief, or faith and unbelief, are definitely incompatible.

And I think there's a kind of progressive Christianity that overly celebrates doubt and skepticism to the detriment of the church. But if you look at the Greek word here for doubt, it's not so much an active or an aggressive rejection of Christ or a staunch refusal to believe against all evidence.

It could also be translated, but some wavered, but some hesitated. I think that's what the scriptures talk about when they talk about, you know, the conviction of faith versus the certainty of sight.

And so what I think is happening here is that yes, the disciples are worshipping, but they're also wavering. And that's real stuff, right? And maybe this strikes you at first as uninspiring or discouraging, but can I just ask, is this not also how most of us Christians worship the risen Christ as well?

Are we not also wavering worshipers? Some days believing the good news more than other days, often hesitant in the ways that we follow and worship Christ.

[15 : 06] And maybe this isn't ideal for worship, but it surely is real, isn't it? It is for me. You know, by its very nature, faith, even the conviction and certainty of faith, it isn't about arriving at some kind of scientific, empirical certainty that would satisfy the likes of, you know, Descartes and modern Western philosophy.

No, our faith is not yet sight. Our faith implies our hesitations and our waverings and the doubts that flood our minds. This is part of the Christian experience, having faith in the midst of our doubts, trusting and hoping in what is unseen, in what is yet to come.

You know, if you are a lifelong, perpetual doubter, God's word to you today is that you're still invited. You're still invited to come to Jesus, just as his eleven were.

God's word to you is that your doubt and your wavering and your hesitation need not be at odds with your worship, nor do your doubts preclude you from participating in God's good plans for the world.

Again, the risen Messiah leaves his faltering followers with a commission and a comfort. He commissions even those who doubt to fulfill the most important mission God's ever given to humanity.

[16 : 22] And he says, go and make disciples even as your doubters. And if that speaks to you this morning, like, we are super glad that you're here. And we believe that this is a church for you.

We'd love to get to know you more. We hope you'll come to our Ask Me Anything lunch to bring your doubts. We hope you'll bring your doubts and find that you can still belong here at Christ Church, even with your doubts, even with your hesitations.

So that's point number one. Now, let's talk about the commission to go and make disciples of all the nations, right? That's the commission, to go and make disciples of all the nations. You know, basically, this is Jesus' elaboration on the creation mandate, the cultural mandate.

Jesus' command here in verse 19 to go and make disciples of the nations, to go and make more followers of him in all the world, to spread his image and likeness among the nations. This is basically a more specific new covenant commandment to be fruitful and to multiply and to fill the earth in spite of the fallenness and brokenness of creation.

He's saying, go and represent me to the world. Bear witness about me from Jerusalem to Judea, to Samaria, to the ends of the earth and multiply the message. Multiply the witnesses. The goal is still the same.

[17 : 32] The glorious image of God reflected across the face of the earth. Especially now, through the incarnation of Christ, the image of God has become clearer, right? It is no longer the image of the invisible God, but the image of the invisible God made visible in the crucified and risen Christ, like in the flesh.

This is Jesus' last command. More disciples, more image of God, more image of me in all the nations. Jesus is making explicit that his kingdom is a cosmic kingdom.

It's a universal kingdom. His authority is universal. But also notice that he doesn't say, go and make soldiers. Go and make armies of all nations. Go and make slaves and servants.

No, Jesus isn't that kind of a king. He says, go and make disciples of all nations. Like the kinds of people he loved to spend time with and teach and eat with and walk with every day.

The kinds of people he called his own family. Disciples whose filthy feet he washed, right? Disciples whom he would forgive. Disciples whom he would die for. That's what he's saying here.

[18 : 38] You know, I think a lot of people, you know, we get uncomfortable around this idea of the Great Commission and evangelism and missions and proselytation, right? Because of the history of colonialism.

It's no good. And I'll be the first to say that so much evil has been done in the name of Christ, right? The Portuguese, the British, the French, the Crusaders wielding Christ's authority with what? Guns and swords.

But that was never the way of Jesus. That was never the way Jesus or his apostles made disciples. Never through coercion, never through force, but always through love and self-sacrifice with joy and compassion and the spirit of inclusion.

I mean, notice how Jesus says to make disciples in verse 19. And see, I don't have time to give a sermon on baptism or the Trinity today, but what Jesus is saying is that you go and make disciples not by forcing them into the family, but by winning them into the family, winning them back into the eternal love, joy, and fellowship of the triune God.

That's what making disciples is about. It's not about racking up numbers like a salesperson. It's about inviting people back into fellowship and inclusion with the maker of their souls.

[19 : 58] It's about inviting people into the joy that they're searching for everywhere else, but that they can only experience in the one true triune God. I love how Pastor John Piper puts it.

He says, missions exist because worship doesn't. Missions exist because worship doesn't. You know, last Sunday at Easter Sunday, didn't you enjoy that worship?

Being in the presence of God. Didn't you enjoy that? Don't you want that for others? Missions exist because worship doesn't. Some people don't get to experience that because they don't know Jesus.

And see, the impulse of the Great Commission, it isn't mere duty. No, it's passion for the worship of God and compassion for those who are worshiping other gods, these other gods that cannot save them, that do not love them, that will not die for them.

The impulse of the Great Commission is a desire for the nations to know the joy of worshiping the Father, the Son, and the Spirit. Just as the psalmists cry out, let the nations be glad, that is the heartbeat of missions.

[20 : 59] Let the nations be glad. So he says to go and make disciples, right, of all the nations by baptizing them into the fellowship of the church and into the fellowship of the triune God, right?

But what else does he say? He says, You know, as a pastor and a preacher, when I first started, my simple goal was for at least one person to say, hey, nice sermon, or good job, or hey, I liked what you said today.

And I'd be like, oh, sweet, at least one person listened and appreciated it. Mission accomplished. But you know, like, as I've continued to develop as a preacher, as a pastor, God's been doing something in me where honestly, I'm starting to care less whether or not you like my preaching.

I'm realizing that the measure that I should use as a preacher shouldn't be how many compliments I get on a Sunday or how many people like listening to me. Honestly, you don't have to like me as a preacher.

You don't have to like what I say. But the real question is, are the people that God's entrusted to me am I just teaching them or am I teaching them to obey everything that Jesus commanded?

[22 : 18] Like, it's dawned on me that I could become this famous preacher to millions. I probably couldn't, but if I did and receive like mailboxes full of praise for the way I preach and invitations to preach here and there all over the world, if not a single one of those listeners actually became a disciple who actually obeyed everything that Jesus commanded them with regard to their money, with regard to their time and their bodies and their sex lives and how they loved their neighbors and cared for the poor and the parentless, then I have failed as a preacher.

Then I have failed as a pastor and as a disciple maker. See, when it comes to this last command of Jesus before he ascended into heaven, this call to make disciples, teaching isn't enough.

It's not enough to get this stuff into your heads without getting it into your hearts and through your hands. Teaching is one thing, but teaching to obey is another. And this is what we're after here at Christ Church.

And can you imagine a world full of disciples of Jesus, disciples who aren't just taught, but who are taught to obey? Can you imagine if that happened? If people living into their identity as disciples and followers of Jesus, living after the image and pattern of Jesus Christ, filled this earth, can you imagine?

I mean, history has borne witness to this movement and this reality, right? For ever since the resurrection, whenever and wherever disciples of Jesus have lived like their master and conformed to his image, abundant life has flowed, sins forgiven, wrecked relationships, reconciled, unity and diversity equally upheld, healings and hospitals, the poor uplifted, women seen as equals, unwanted children welcomed into families and the marginalized of society have found belonging when the people of God pursue the image of God.

[24 : 17] Don't you want to be a part of that? Don't you want to make disciples of the nations for the good of the nations? If you're looking for a place to start, you know, we'd love to talk to you about that, set you up with someone to disciple you or maybe set someone else up to be disciplined by you.

And we're always looking for community group leaders here at Christ Church. They fill up so fast, let's talk. But maybe you're here today and you think of your faith as just something you do on Sundays or what you lean on in hard times and that's the extent of your discipleship under Jesus Christ.

Maybe you feel like you don't have time to sit at Jesus' feet to listen to him and to live in communion with him daily and you're especially uninterested in like going and making disciples, right?

But again, in those places in your life where you feel like that's not under the discipleship of Jesus, please don't fool yourself. You are a disciple to something and you are making disciples, even if that just means passively making disciples of the Bay Area status quo.

Jesus' great commission has to animate every square inch of our lives in our homes, in our schools, in our workplaces, in our leisure, not just within the walls of the church.

[25 : 34] Like if relationship building and investing in people, drawing people into deeper relationships with Christ, seeing them baptized into closer communion with the triune God, if living for the joy of others and the fellowship of others and for the belonging and inclusion and all the benefits of union with Christ for others is not what we're living for.

If seeing people live the way that Jesus commanded, if seeing a whole world of people, the nations, living the way Jesus did, if this isn't what we're living for, if disciples are not what we're aiming to make, then what are we living for?

What are we doing? And is it really better? Is it the hope of the world? Now maybe for you this morning, you've heard this commission, you've heard this command from Jesus to make disciples, but you're afraid of failure and I get that.

And you're afraid maybe of what it might cost you, because it is costly. You're afraid of sharing the gospel with your family, your friend, your coworkers, your neighbors, because you're afraid of the questions or of seeming foolish or naive or judgmental.

Or maybe you're afraid to let go of this or that truly good commitment in your life in order to make more room to invest in making disciples of the nations. Well, could I just close by reminding you that this risen Messiah left us not only with a commission, but also with a comfort?

[26 : 56] To those of us who are afraid to be disciple-making disciples of Jesus, thinking like, what if we fail? And what authority do I have to call people to follow me as I follow Christ?

Could I just remind you today that Jesus says, all authority in heaven and on earth have been given to him. It's been given to me, he says, therefore go and make disciples of the nations.

And this is the gospel. It's not about your authority. It's not about your power, but it's about his. It's all his. All the authority is his in heaven and on earth. Your job is simply to point to his authority, his gentle authority, the authority that he won, not by bowing down to the tempter in the wilderness, but by bowing down to his Father and rising again by the Spirit.

We need not go out into the world to make disciples of the nations in our own authority, but we go with Christ's authority. And success is sure, fully empowered by his Spirit to be fruitful and to multiply and to fill the earth with his power, with his presence, ruling and reigning with him as royal priesthood he calls us.

And man, that's power. That's real power. All right? Authority over every sickness, every sadness, every oppression, authority to break every chain of injustice. It all belongs to him.

[28 : 19] And he's called us to go in his name just like his disciples. And not only does he comfort us with his authority, but also with his presence. Verse 20, this is my favorite part of the Great Commission. And surely, I am with you always.

We need not go about making disciples on our own. We can't. But God with us can. And he invites us to participate in his work in the world.

It's like bring your children to work day only like it's actually productive and life-giving and affirming for your vocation. He wants us to come alongside of him as his apprentices, as his disciples.

He says, surely I am with you always, to the very end, or in the Greek, to the very fullness, to the very completion, to the very perfection of this age. Like all the way to the happy ending, he says.

All the way to the happy ending. His presence is with us all the way to the perfect, beautiful, glorious, satisfying ending of the story that all of our hearts long for. So how could we fail if he's with us?

[29 : 24] And what shall we fear? Imagine how differently we might live if we all believed in the authority of Jesus and in the presence of Jesus to go and make disciples of the nations.

What liberation and hope and joy might be ours if we realized that the success of the church in her mission and the consummation of God's very kingdom purposes have less to do with his faltering followers and everything to do with the authority and the presence of Jesus Christ with us all the way to the happy ending.

See, this gospel account of Matthew started with Emmanuel, right? God with us and in the same way it ends with God with us always. Perhaps the most foundational, profound truth of the gospel that God would be with us forever.

Like, no matter the cost, God with us. It's incredible. You know, this week, one of our staff members, Maria Francis, she's our assistant director of ministry, she was sharing about how she was gonna have dinner with an old friend.

Her and Pastor Mike, her husband, are from Florida. So this friend from Florida was in the bay and she was gonna have dinner with them, but the thing was, this friend hadn't seen Mike since before his accident and his traumatic brain injury and his, you know, devastating memory loss.

[30 : 48] And so Maria was kind of fretting about, like, oh, how's this dinner gonna go? How's this friend gonna experience this guy who was her former pastor that she looked up to but who was a new Mike, no longer the person that he once was.

So as a staff, we prayed for Maria about that dinner and I wanna tell you what happened. So Maria said they had a great time. They had dumplings and ice cream. Sounded wonderful. And then as they were leaving to say goodbye, good old Pastor Mike, who probably couldn't remember this girl's name, right?

He did remember something, though. Something at the core of who he is and something he wanted this girl to remember as they were saying goodbye. And what he said to her was this.

He said, remember who you belong to, the God who promised never to leave you nor forsake you. And these words from her former pastor, like, made this girl burst into tears.

And when I heard this, I was like, man, thank you, God. And man, Pastor Mike still got it. Still making disciples, still fulfilling the great commission.

[32 : 06] And if Pastor Mike can't remember anything else but that surely the I am is with him always and with us always, even to the end of the age.

If the truth of God with us can be so indelibly etched into his heart and his very being that even after he's lost so much else, he can still be leading people into deeper relationships with Christ.

like, what reason do we have not to join Pastor Mike in this great news commission to make disciples of the nations as the commandment of God for his people?

That's the church he wants us to be. Let's pray. Surely you are with us always even to the end of the age.

What good news is that, Lord? What amazing good news. We who have no business being in your presence you've drawn near to us in Christ.

[33 : 25] You made your dwelling amongst us you died for our sins you buried them you've risen to new life and you raise us up with you you seat us on your lap in the heavenly places with the angels and archangels next to the Father on high so how can we not obey you?

How can we not want this for other people? Oh Lord, would the heartbeat of this church of Christ Church East Bay would it be let the nations be glad let the nations be glad in you let the nations be glad in their maker and in their redeemer let the nations be glad in Christ the only kind of God who loves us so much that he would die for us so make this the heartbeat of our church Lord God and start with me let the nations be glad and would you make disciples of the nations through this body of faith we pray starting with this city and beyond in the name of Jesus Amen the nossa