

PM Matthew 28 The Great Commission

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[0 : 00] I'd like us to read together this evening from the Gospel of Matthew, chapter 28. So this is the last chapter of Matthew.

So it's on page 1006 of the Church Bible. So it's the last, the final chapter of Matthew. Matthew deals with the ministry of the Lord Jesus. And then in chapter 26, we have the death of Christ, his crucifixion, and the events surrounding that. So that took place on Friday. So we take up the reading on the Sunday morning in chapter 28, verse 1.

And then we go to Galilee.

[2 : 08] There you will see him. See, I have told you. So they departed quickly from the tomb with fear and great joy and ran to tell his disciples.

And behold, Jesus met them and said, Greetings. And they came up and took hold of his feet and worshipped him.

Then Jesus said to them, Do not be afraid. Go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee. And there they will see me. While they were going, behold, some of the guard went into the city and told the chief priests all that had taken place.

And when they had assembled with the elders and taken counsel, they gave a sufficient sum of money to the soldiers and said, Tell people, his disciples came by night and stole him away while we were asleep.

And if this comes to the governor's ears, we will satisfy him and keep you out of trouble. So they took the money and did as they were directed. And this story has been spread among the Jews to this day.

[3 : 18] Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them. And when they saw him, they worshipped him.

But some doubted. And Jesus came and said to them, All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son.

And of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always to the end of the age.

May God bless to us that reading of his word. I'd like us to turn back this evening to Matthew's Gospel, chapter 28.

And we're looking just at the last three verses, verses 18 to 20. And I want us to look at these closing words and climax of Matthew's Gospel, often called the Great Commission.

[4 : 29] And I want to begin with two observations. 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 and tribes and language and ethnic groups than ever before, meeting in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. If I can share my own experience, I've been privileged to experience just a tiny part of that huge diversity.

I've been in four hour long services in Nigeria, which included lots of dancing. I remember meeting a saffron robed leader of a group of Christ devotees in Varanasi, the centre of Hindu India.

Or taking part in meetings where people prayed in Farsi, in Dari, in Kurdish Sarani, as well as in English. I've got friends who have translated the Bible into, well, a number of friends in different languages.

But think of a couple who went to a very remote tribe in Papua New Guinea and translated the Bible into that language. And today there is a church in that people group.

[5 : 52] And also just the privilege of worshipping in multi-ethnic churches in the Gulf and in services conducted in Nepali, in Urdu, in Hindi, in Ladakh, in Gaelic, Hungarian, Tamil, Malayalam and a number of other languages.

And of course worshipping in the free church as well. And that's just a tiny, tiny fraction of the worldwide church.

But all of these centred upon the same Lord, Jesus Christ. And it's amazing when you think that it all began with just a few unpromising, ordinary, uneducated folk in Galilee.

A backwater of the Roman Empire. And yet today, this movement is global in countless languages and peoples and ethnic groups. So that's the first observation.

The second observation is that there are still huge areas of the world. Peoples, languages, ethnic groups that are hardly reached at all with the gospel of Jesus Christ.

[7 : 03] There are still over 1,400 languages that have no part of the Bible translated into them. And closer to home, there are villages, towns, parts of cities with very little in the way of access for people to hear the gospel, the good news of Christ.

And there's widespread ignorance of the Bible and its message in this town and across our land today. And so there is still much work to be done.

So with those two observations in mind, let's turn to Matthew 28, verses 18 to 20, to the Great Commission. I think the key word in this is the word all.

It appears four times and just expresses that this commission is total and all-encompassing. Let me just, this is my own translation, which is a bit clumsy in English, but it brings out that word all.

So then Jesus drew near to them and said to them, All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them into the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to obey all that I have commanded you.

[8 : 26] And remember, I myself am with you all the days until the end of the age. So there's all authority. Second, all nations.

Third, all Jesus commands. And fourth, all of the time. And so we're just going to go through those one by one. And if by the end of the second point you're getting worried that we're going to be here until very late, don't worry, the last two points are a bit shorter.

So first of all, all authority. This is the reason, the basis, the statement of fact that comes before the command.

For those of you who are into grammar, it's the indicative before the imperative. So Jesus says that all authority in heaven and on earth has been given to him.

In other words, universal kingship, lordship has been given to Jesus Christ. If you read the Gospels and the teaching that Jesus gave, almost every time he opened his mouth he talked about the kingdom of God, or the kingdom of heaven, it often is in Matthew.

[9 : 38] And that Jesus' teaching was about the kingdom of God. But now we see very clearly, we've seen it before, but very clearly Jesus is now claiming to be the king.

He is the one with all authority in heaven and on earth. And it's been given to him by God the Father. Now, you might say, well, hang on a minute.

How can this man, this first century Jewish peasant, from near the margins of the Roman Empire, how can he claim to be king over everything, heaven and earth, the universe?

And not only that, one who was crucified in utter humiliation. How can he claim to be the king of the whole world, to be the lord of the entire universe? Why should his disciples have believed him?

Why should we believe him today? Well, I think it helps to understand the context into which Jesus said this. See, the Jewish scriptures, we call it the Old Testament, but for them it was just the scriptures.

[10 : 51] The Jewish scriptures, or the Old Testament, prophesied a Messiah figure. One who would come and reign with justice and righteousness.

Who would be king of Israel, of the Israelites. But also his authority would extend over all the nations of the world. Let me just give you two or three examples.

So, in Genesis 49, Jacob is blessing or sort of prophesying about his sons. And he comes to Judah. And he says, And of course, Jesus came from the tribe of Judah.

Or Psalm 72, which is, well, at the beginning it says, Of Solomon. And people debate as to whether it means it's by Solomon, or about Solomon.

But it's very clearly about the king in David's line. And has reference to the ultimate king, the Messiah. And in verse 8, May he rule from sea to sea, and from the river to the ends of the earth. [12:12] And verse 11, May all kings bow down to him, and all nations serve him. But then there's one particular passage from the Old Testament that Jesus is really kind of referring to, alluding to here.

And it's Daniel chapter 7. And in that chapter, Daniel has a vision of four ferocious beasts, which represent four different kingdoms, or empires, and their kings.

And he sees these sort of ravening beasts. And then he sees heaven, and the throne of God. And God is here given the title, the Ancient of Days. And then he says, this is in verses 13 and 14, 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. 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 Jesus, not for the first time, identifies himself with this exalted figure in Daniel, this one like a son of man.

[13:39] And I'm sure you noticed some of the echoes in Jesus' words from that passage. All authority given to him. All nations, for all time, that it's everlasting, an everlasting kingship.

So Jesus is here making this claim that he is this king. He is the Messiah. He is this son of man. Now this meeting in Galilee at which Jesus says this, it takes place just days, or the most weeks, after Jesus has been brutally crucified by the Roman Empire, having been mocked and ridiculed for his claim to be a king.

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, and he is there with them.

Because Jesus has been raised from the dead by the power of God. The human verdict on Jesus was that he was a fake king, an imposter, deserving of rejection and torture and death.

[14:55] But God utterly turned that verdict on its head. And this rising from the dead is the most spectacular, stunning vindication of Jesus and all that he claimed to be, including his claim to be the Messiah, the Son of Man, the King.

And that resurrection of Jesus is something that those disciples witnessed with their own eyes.

They saw him alive after his death with their own eyes. On this and on other occasions too.

And they gave witness to that in their preaching and in their writing, which is in the New Testament.

And we can sum that up with the words, we have seen the Lord risen from the dead.

And many of those disciples paid for that claim with their lives. They were martyred for that claim.

But when was this authority given? Jesus is a divine person.

We will see that in a moment that he shares in the divine name. And so as divine, as God, in one sense he has always ruled. But in Jesus Christ, God came to this world in human form, in human flesh.

[16:15] And as this person, as this man, Jesus Christ, he is both fully God and fully human. He is the mediator between God and human beings who has now completed his mission.

mission. And as the God-man, as the mediator between God and humans who has completed that mission, Jesus has now been given this authority.

then another question, what kind of king is he? See, maybe the idea of someone claiming to be king over all nations makes you a bit uneasy.

It sounds imperialistic. An empire, whether in the past or in the present, is so problematic in the world. One country just taking control of other countries and imposing its rule.

We don't like that. But this king is radically different from the kings and emperors and rulers that world history has thrown up.

[17:22] Perhaps one passage that really brings that out clearly is 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 Gentiles lord it over them and their great ones exercise authority over them.

Of course, that's all too familiar. That's the world we know. But then Jesus goes on. 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.

When Jesus said those words that last line was still a prediction. It was still in the future. But now it has happened. Jesus has given this ultimate service this ultimate act for the benefit of others. He has given his life as a ransom for many. And so Jesus is the king whose policy whose way of ruling is service.

[18:31] It's self-giving self-sacrificial love. That's the kind of king that Jesus Christ is. And so Jesus has all authority in heaven and on earth.

His reign is universal. He is the world's true king and rightful lord. And the call of the gospel the call of Jesus Christ to you today is to turn to him and receive him as your king.

To recognize him and acknowledge him as the true king and lord of all. And to give him your allegiance your faith your devotion your commitment your love.

Well the second point is that it's all nations so we've had all authority second all nations. In verse 19 Jesus says go therefore and make disciples of all nations.

And the main verb here is the verb make disciples. A disciple is a follower a learner an apprentice someone who learns as they go along on the job following a spiritual leader and coming under his authority and in this case that is Jesus.

[19:57] And it's all nations. Again that echoes Daniel chapter 7 where this one like a son of man it says that all peoples nations and languages will serve him.

And so that's echoed in Jesus' words here. And then another passage is Genesis chapter 18 verse 18 where God says about Abraham that all the nations of the earth and it's the same phrase in Greek it's all the nations shall be blessed in him.

That's in Abraham and in Abraham's offspring. And that reminds us that from the very beginning of the Bible in Genesis that God begins to work out his gracious plan to bring blessing to all nations through Abraham, Abraham's offspring, ultimately that is Jesus Christ.

So that is why the command is to make disciples of all nations. Now the word nations translates a Greek word, it's the word ethne and it's from what we get the English word ethnic from.

So really it means it's not nations as in kind of nation states but rather ethnic groups or people groups. So for example India is one nation but there's over 1500 languages by one estimate at least, each representing an ethne or an ethnic group.

[21:25] And of course ethnicity can be defined by other factors like culture or race or religious affiliation, geography. And so Jesus is saying that whatever language or race or religion or culture or customs or intellectual traditions you have, Jesus Christ claims kingship over all the ethnic groups in the world.

I wonder what you think of when the word ethnic is used, say ethnic music or ethnic clothes or jewellery or ethnic cuisine. We often think of something that's kind of foreign and a bit exotic. But from a first century Jewish perspective remember that Jesus and all his earliest disciples were Jews. Scotland and Britain were just as ethnic as anywhere else. In fact you couldn't really get any more ethnic than that.

We were at the furthest flung corner of the globe. And I think that reminds us that this first applies to your own people, our family, our friends, our neighbours, our classmates, our work colleagues, those around us, those in our immediate vicinity, we have a responsibility to those people.

And as a first step we can pray for those in our orbit, those people that God has put in our path. It might be that that person that you maybe see every week, that you meet them in whatever circumstance, your neighbour or whatever it is, that you're the only person who prays for that person, that other person.

[23:07] And so that is a responsibility on us to pray for those that God brings into our path. But then also in addition to that to look and pray for opportunities to share something of your faith in Jesus Christ.

Might be just something as simple as what did you do at the weekend? And you can say well I went to church and I met with God's people, I worshipped God there. And just see where that leads. So it's our mission is to make disciples of all the nations of the world. And there's a kind of a logical movement of thought here.

And it's basically this, that since Jesus Christ is king of the world, since he is lord of all the ethne, since he has authority over all nations, then all nations need to know and to be called to give their allegiance to King Jesus and to submit to his authority.

That's the impetus for what starts in the book of Acts, where we read of the disciples, beginning there in Jerusalem and working out through Judea and Samaria and then to the ends of the earth, taking that message of King Jesus.

[24 : 26] And for us as Jesus' disciples today, mission begins at home, but it doesn't stay there. We're to have an interest in the cause of Christ across the whole world, not just in our own local church or in Scotland, but the cause of Christ in all nations, in the whole world.

And so it involves praying for, learning about people and places, and when we have opportunity to share our own faith with others, seek to make disciples of Jesus Christ.

And we all have different gifts, we're not the same, and we thank God for that. Some of you may be just really good at talking to people and sharing your faith in a very natural way.

Some of us aren't as good at that. Some of us may be able to give hospitality, or some of us might be just good at inviting folk to events at church, or maybe doing stuff on social media.

And there's just all kinds of ways in which we can just work together to promote Christ and his gospel and seek to make disciples of others. And for many situations it's actually just people seeing the quality of our lives.

[25 : 56] I was at a church in Edinburgh a couple of weeks ago and there was a baptism of a guy who lived in a block and he had no church connection that, well at least I was aware of, but there was a woman who lived in the same block and he just observed her life and was impressed by that life.

And then this woman died, and there was a funeral which he went to because he liked her, he'd been impressed with her. And just at the funeral he heard the message and he just thought, I want what that neighbour of mine had.

And so he came to faith in Christ. And often it's as people see the difference in our lives, they see that we are Christ followers and see maybe our integrity or gentleness or joy.

people and they want that for themselves. And I hope that is true of all of us, that people will see that in us. A couple of other things, one is that Jesus says go and make disciples.

And mission involves a movement towards other people. Now some situations that might be going to another country and adapting to the local culture.

[27 : 17] So for example, Hudson Taylor, 19th century Yorkshireman, went to China. And there he adopted Chinese dress, he wore Chinese clothes, he wore a Chinese hairstyle.

He was mocked by other British people for doing that. But it broke down the barriers and enabled him to communicate the gospel to Chinese people. For as it might not involve that, but it may involve us just going outside our comfort zone in seeking to meet people where they are, people who don't know the good news of Jesus Christ, and seeking new ways to communicate the gospel in a changing culture.

It's been my privilege to know a number of Bible translators, and Bible translators have to wrestle with terms, with words. How do I express this idea in this new language that I'm translating into? And they wrestle with that. But in a way, all of us have to do that. How can we communicate the gospel, the good news, to the people that we know, the people that God has brought into our path? And then baptizing them into the name of the Father and the Son and of the Holy Spirit. So baptism is the initiation into the community of disciples.

[28 : 37] So it's bringing people to faith in Christ. Christ. And just notice that there's one name, it's into the one name, the one name of God. And there's only one name, that's biblical monotheism.

There's only one true living God with one name, Yahweh, the Lord. And yet there are three who share that name, the Father, the Son, who is Jesus, and the Holy Spirit.

And here we see this just astonishing claim that this man, Jesus, is not only claiming to be the king of the universe, he's also claiming here to share in the name, in the identity of the one true living God.

But third, we come to all Jesus' commands. And basically that's the whole Bible. Discipleship is about bringing our lives into obedience to Jesus Christ, individually and also collectively.

and that begins with me, with my life. And it's an ongoing, lifelong process of bringing my life into obedience to Jesus Christ.

[29 : 49] It's the long, sometimes painful process of bringing my life into conformity with his will. To truly love God with all my being and love my neighbour as myself.

To be a disciple is to obey Jesus Christ. And it never stops in this life. There's no time when you can think, I've arrived as a disciple, that's it, it's over.

There's a constant to the end of life, just working at, bringing our lives increasingly into conformity with the will of Jesus Christ. And it encompasses everything because Jesus is Lord of all.

So, you do different jobs, have different careers, or maybe you study things. Whatever it is we do, Jesus Christ is Lord of that, of healthcare, of economics, of science, of art, the environment, business.

Jesus Christ is Lord of all. And so, we bring it all, we seek to work in that field and bring it under the Lordship of Christ. Abraham Kuyper, Dutch, Reformed theologian, and was Prime Minister of the Netherlands around the turn of the 20th century, he said that there's not one square inch in the whole domain of our human existence over which Christ, who is sovereign, over all, does not cry mine.

[31 : 20] And then another Dutch Reformed thinker and missionary, J.H. Bavin said this, he said, in our time we still struggle with the idea of the kingdom of God, or the kingship of God.

For a long time Christians have over emphasized the fact that Christian faith is something that concerns mankind's innermost being, and is a way to salvation.

without paying enough attention to the fact that faith places men and women in the perspective of the kingdom. That includes the fact that the believer must strive after a new world.

Something of the power of the new life in Jesus Christ must penetrate social and economic life, commerce and industry, science and art.

We must not leave any sector of individual or social life to its own devices. God wants us to gather together right now all things in this world under one head, Christ.

[32 : 30] And that gives value to whatever you do, your work, your studies. It's not just something that is sort of second rate and secular. No, it's part of Christ's world and we are to work at that and bring it to subjection to Jesus Christ.

Well, the fourth thing is all of the time. Jesus concludes by saying, and remember, behold, I am with you always to the end of the age, or all the days until the end of the age.

At the beginning of Matthew, we're told about the birth of Jesus and that we're told in Matthew 1 about the birth of Jesus that all this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophets. The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son and they will call him Emmanuel, which means God with us. In the middle of Matthew, in chapter 18, Jesus says, where two or three gather in my name, there I am with them.

And now at the end, right at the end of Matthew, Jesus Christ promises to be with us as we seek to multiply disciples. I could say it's one of the main themes of Matthew.

[33 : 51] It's there at the beginning, the middle and the end. God with us, Christ with us. Shortly after this meeting in Galilee, Jesus Christ ascends into heaven.

And today he is with us through his spirit, the Holy Spirit, who is the spirit of Christ, whom he sends to his disciples in every age. And Christ doesn't promise us success, at least not as individuals or as a congregation, as a church in any particular time or place.

He doesn't promise us an easy ride as we strive to fulfill his mission. There may often be frustration and hard work and opposition and misunderstanding and trials and difficulties of all kinds.

promise. But what he does promise is that he will be with us. As we seek to live and speak for him in a world that is challenging and sometimes hostile or indifferent, he promises that he'll be with us. And notice that Jesus specifically applies this to us today every bit as much as to his first disciples. We see that in what he says. He says, I'll be with you all the days until the end of the age.

[35 : 13] This age is still going on. We haven't reached the end of the age. The end of the age will come when Jesus Christ returns. And so this promise is every bit as much for us today, for believers today, as it was for Peter and John and James and the other disciples who were with him on that occasion.

And so let us seek to live for and to speak for Christ. To seek to become ourselves disciples of Jesus Christ, better disciples, obeying his teaching and to make disciples for him of others.

In the assurance that he is with us every moment of every day until the end of the age. May God bless his word to us. Let's pray. Lord, we thank you for your word to us this evening.

We thank you for Matthew's gospel and how it climaxes with this. The fact that Jesus Christ is king. He is Lord of all. And Lord, that's a great comfort in this world today where it's so uncertain, so

chaotic, where there are so many wars and rumours of war.

And yet we know that Jesus Christ has all authority in heaven and on earth. And we rejoice in that. And we pray that you would help us, that you would enable us to proclaim that by our lives and by our words that those you bring us into contact with, those who you bring into our path, whoever that may be, that we would work and pray for the kingship of Jesus Christ to be acknowledged and recognised by others.

[37 : 05] So grant us your presence, we pray. We thank you that you do promise us your presence with us. And we pray in your name. Amen.