The Great Commission (2)

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[0:00] Please turn again with me this morning to that passage we read in Matthew chapter 28. All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.

Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations. The Gospel of Matthew begins in the ancient practice of Jewish genealogy.
It ends in the modern practice of world mission, where the good news of the kingdom of God goes out to all the nations of the world.
This Gospel is an explosive powder keg. It begins with one man, Abraham. And it ends with the divine vision of all the nations of the earth bowing down before King Jesus.
And it all coalesces around this one idea. Making disciples. Making disciples.
[1:08] All the way through Matthew's Gospel, Jesus has been making disciples. And now at the very end, he commissions those disciples he has made. To make disciples of all the nations.

The Gospel is going global. And it does so by making disciples of all the peoples of the world. I could wish that we had longer to ponder together the Great Commission of Jesus in Matthew 28, 18 through 20.
For any who want to explore deeper, Professor Donald MacLeod delivered five lectures on this Great Commission many years ago in Glasgow City. And you can access those lectures on our website.
Time is limited today. And we need to get straight to the point. Namely, the Great Commission of Jesus is all about making disciples for him.
Baptising them into the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. And teaching them to observe everything he has commanded us. I want to do this in three steps today.
[2:19] Principles of discipleship. Preparation for discipleship. And program of discipleship. Are you a disciple of Jesus Christ?

Well, if you are, the Great Commission of Jesus is calling you to make more disciples of Jesus Christ. First of all then, principles of discipleship.
Principles of discipleship. I don't want to spend very long on this first point because we dealt with it in depth last week. But it really is so important that we must return to it and drive it deep into our hearts.
Namely, that the Church is called to go forth in mission on the basis of the two great pillars of the sovereignty of God.
His power and his presence. First of all, his power. The Great Commission of Jesus begins with the words, All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.
[3:21] Just as Neil Armstrong planted the flag of the United States on the moon. So Jesus has planted his flag of ownership and kingship over all heaven and all earth.

Which means that he is Lord of both Jew and Gentile. Lord of the nations to which we go forth with the gospel. There's nowhere we can take the good news of Jesus, but that Jesus isn't already Lord there.
Yes, even in the heart of the Roman Empire, in Caesar's palace in Rome itself. And so the disciple of Jesus who engages in mission needs to have confidence in this.
That there's among the unreached people groups of the world. Even those monsters are Jesus's monsters. Jesus has power over every people group.
And over every heart. Do you believe this? That Jesus is greater than any philosophy or religion. That Jesus can overcome the apathy and the hardness of our society.
[4:31] Well, we better believe it. Because if we don't, there's really no point in engaging in mission. Secondly, the second pillar is Jesus' presence.

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His presence. The Great Commission ends with the promise of Jesus. And behold, I'm with you always to the very end of the age. We're not going alone to proclaim the gospel to the nations. For not only has the flag of Jesus already been planted among them, but he goes with us on our mission. He's not five miles behind us as the generals were behind the common troops in World War I.
But he is before us. He is behind us. And by his Holy Spirit, he is in us. And again, the disciple of Jesus who engages in the Great Commission needs to have confidence in this.
But though this mission is going to be hard and challenging, though there will be many obstacles and much resistance to the gospel we preach, though there will be times that we are utterly exhausted and not a little disillusioned, Jesus will always be with us.
[5:42] With us in the throne rooms of hostile kings and in the parliaments of hostile peoples. Jesus will always be with us.

We know what it means for a church to live on the right side of Easter Day. In the full, glaring, dazzling light of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ.
The kind of Christians and the kind of church which by grace we aspire to be. These are the principles of discipleship. Forget them at your peril. Well, secondly this morning, preparations for discipleship.
Preparations for discipleship. Look closely with me at the Great Commission of Jesus and you will notice that our Lord assumes certain things about his church.
He makes assumptions about the kind of people who will engage in mission. Perhaps assumptions is not the right word. Perhaps conditions or preparations would be a better word.
[7:10] Things which are true of us as those who are determined to engage in the Great Commission and to go forth and make disciples for him. These are his conditions.

The preparations we need to make if we are to be earnest as a church and as Christians about reaching the nations with the gospel and discipling all peoples. And these assumptions are twofold. Knowing and going. Knowing and going. Knowing first of all. Notice who it is Jesus gives the Great Commission to.
His disciples. His disciples. There were 11 of them on top of that mountain with him to hear these great words. And these men were already devoted to Jesus.
They already knew Jesus. And Jesus was calling these disciples to make more disciples for him. To become disciple making disciples.
[8:14] And the assumption Jesus is making is that those who will obey the Great Commission to make disciples of all the nations are already Christians.

They are already disciples of Christ. Over the years, a rather unhelpful dichotomy has grown up between those who do mission and those who do theology.
Those who love other human beings and those who love God. I say it's unhelpful because it's both unhistorical and un-Christlike.
No one loved to talk about God more than Jesus. But no one loved mission more than Jesus. No one in the late 19th century Scottish church was more theologically grounded than the Boner brothers, Horatius and Andrew.
But similarly, no one in the late 19th century Scottish church was as keenly missional as the Boner brothers, Horatius and Andrew. The summary of the Ten Commandments rests in this.
[9:24] Love God and love your neighbour. The two go together, you see. A passion for God. A passion for mission. They must.

For it's as we know Christ better that we want to proclaim his love all the more. And it's as we see the need of our fellow human beings more, we want to tell them about the Jesus whose grace is sufficient for all people.
At all times. In all places. And as I said earlier in our service, that's what makes the Langham partnership such a great partner for us.
Because in Langham, these two great pillars go together. A passion for God. A passion for mission. But to go back to this basic point.
Jesus is assuming that those who will engage with his command to go and make disciples for him are already Christians. And therefore, by necessary consequence, he is also assuming that all Christians everywhere at all times will engage with the Great Commission.

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[10:43] In other words, the making of disciples is not the preserve of an especially gifted few. Rather, it's the duty of every Christian to make disciples for him.

We all have our different roles in making disciples. Some of us are on the front line, as it were. Speaking. Sharing. Proclaiming. Others are working in vital support roles of resourcing.
Prayer. Planning. Hospitality. But whoever we are, this is our Great Commission. All of us. Christ is speaking to every one of us this morning.
Make disciples of all the nations for him. Do what you can do. You in your small corner. Me in mine. Amen. Knowing.
Second preparation. Going. Going. Now, the syntax of the Great Commission is very important in understanding its major emphases.
[11:51] There really is actually only one command in this whole commission. One imperative in this command. Make disciples. That's the imperative.

That's the command. The goal is not a command. Rather, it's in a form which assumes that in order to make more disciples, the disciple of Jesus has already gone.
Perhaps it would be better translated in this way. Having gone. Make disciples. Now, think of what this means in its original setting.
All these disciples of Jesus gathered with them on top of that mountain were ethnic Jews who were passionate about the salvation of their own people.
Jesus is telling them. Jesus is telling them that if they want to make disciples of all the nations, they're going to have to leave the boundaries of Israel proper and go and mix with the unclean.
[12:47] It's only then and there they'll start mix. They'll start making disciples for him. The Gospel of Matthew begins with Abraham, the father of the Jewish nation.

And it ends with the command to make disciples of all the nations. What began with God's call to Abraham to leave out of the Chaldees, we have to also leave if we want to make disciples for Christ.
Now, I've scoured my mind looking for contemporary applications of this command to go, because on one hand, it cannot mean that the call of God to us means that all of us will leave our homes, our families and our lawful employments to take up missionary service in Somalia.
That goes against the whole tenor of New Testament theology. But on the other hand, it cannot mean something quite as toothless as saying, well, we should all be willing to go if God calls us.
Going is not an attitude, it's an action. Now, it seems to me that in the first instance, this is calling us to become missionary Christians. Missionary Christians, the only kind of Christians that are.
[14:06] We're always to be thinking about how we can make more disciples for Jesus, whether it's at home, whether it's at work, in whatever settings God places us in.

So we're all in families. Go in your mindset as missionaries to your families. Make disciples of your children by baptising and teaching.
We've got work colleagues, all of us. Go in your mindset as missionaries to them. Making disciples of them by the way in which you work. The kind words you speak to them.
And your prayers on their behalf. Always asking the question, how can I use my words and my actions and my time to make more disciples for Jesus?
This is calling us to have a missionary mindset in all things, to all people, in all places. In other words, this is calling us that as individual disciples of Jesus, we're missionaries.
[15:14] Be serious about mission to those in your sphere of influence. Be as serious about being missionaries to them as professional missionaries are about those to whom they share the gospel.

And that means if you're a Christian student today, your mission field are your fellow students. If you're a Christian office worker, your mission field is your fellow office workers.
If you're a Christian commuter today, your mission field are your fellow commuters. If you're a Christian who's a member of a gym today, your mission field are your fellow gym members.
That's how the ministry and the mission of a church must work. Each of us are God's missionaries.
But in the second instance, it seems to me that this is calling us to leave the sacred isolation of Christian fellowship.
Leave the sacred isolation of Christian fellowship. The Christians are, these disciples are told, go from this mountain. And to go from this mountain, they will need to leave the exclusive presence of Jesus behind them.

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[16:31] Because the only way they're going to make disciples for Jesus is by mixing with the nations, by going out to the people. One of the reasons that we in Glasgow City Free Church have taken the conscious decision not to multiply church meetings is that if we chose to have meetings every night of the week, none of us would have time to spend with our families, our friends, our work colleagues, our fellow gym members.

In other words, none of us would have time to be missionaries. So to go means to leave the holy huddle. On the inside of the front door of our new building, I really think we should have a sign saying, go and to make disciples of all the nations.
We need to leave the sacred halls behind. We need to mix with the world in all its need, just as Jesus did. I'm sure we all would love to closet our children away.
But as young disciples of Christ, they too need to be exposed to the world. In my experience, Christian children can often be more effective evangelists than their adult counterparts, which is one reason I'm very hesitant about Christian schools.
If you want to be a successful disciple-making disciple for Jesus, you need to be a man among men. You need to be in and among the people. You need to go to the nations.
[18:04] Because it's here the rubber of our discipleship hits the road of the world's apathy and hardness. So these are two things that Jesus assumes. There are preparation for engaging with the Great Commission.

That we are already disciples for Jesus and each of us has a missionary mindset. Jesus is calling us to make disciples for him among people we already know.
Is that you? Is that me? Well, for Jesus, this is the normal Christian life.
And then thirdly and lastly, programs of discipleship. Programs of discipleship. The main verb of the Great Commission is the word making disciples.
This main verb is conditioned by two present participles which define what it means to make disciples. Disciple-making doesn't require a specific gifting.
[19:09] Far less that we need to go to college for three years before we become qualified disciple-making disciples. Disciple-making consists in two things. Baptizing and teaching.

That's it. Baptizing and teaching. Baptizing, first of all. I wish I could have more time than I do to explain the significance of baptism in Matthew's theology.
Jesus was baptized according to the Jewish ritual by John the Baptist in the River Jordan. And we also read that the disciples of Jesus baptized many people. Baptism in the context of the Great Commission, it seems to me, indicates at least two things.
First, a new identity. A new identity. A new identity. The person who applies for baptism is saying he is a new person.
Baptism in the name of the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. That he's characterized no longer by his affiliation or connection with the world or his former life, but by his association with God the Father, with God the Son, and with God the Holy Spirit.
[20:26] One true and living God. In other words, baptism is the public declaration that this person now belongs to Christ. That this person is also now a disciple of Christ.

That the name of God rests upon him. That he's baptized into the name of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. He is under new ownership, as it were. Have you believed into the name of Christ?
You believe he is Lord? Have you trusted in him? Do you want to be known as a Christian? Then be baptized, because this is the public declaration of your new identity in him.
That's why in the Presbyterian Church, we baptize the infants of Christian parents. To set them apart for Christ, according to God's promise.
And to associate them into the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. And as we go through the book of Acts, the history of the early church, we're struck by how many baptisms there are.
[21:33] Thousands and thousands and thousands. People are coming to faith in Christ. People want to publicly declare their faith in Christ, and so they are baptized.

You know, it really is imperative that if we have become Christians, or have been Christians, that we declare it publicly. We make it known. In our tradition, because so many of us were baptized as infants, we tend to use the Lord's Supper in this place.
That if we are disciples of Christ, we declare it publicly, by drinking the wine and by eating the bread of the Holy Communion. A new identity.

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But secondly, it seems to me, baptism indicates a new family. A new family. It means incorporation into the body of believers we call the church.
One disciple among many disciples. It was utterly inconceivable to Jesus that one of his disciples would not want to associate with the other disciples.
[22:39] That they wouldn't want to be members of the church. This is discipleship in the raw. Membership in a church with all of its challenges.

There are many. With all of its joys and its sorrows. Fellowship in service. Learning how to love the unlovable and forgive the unforgivable. In other words, baptism means church.
A churchless discipleship is no discipleship at all. It is the church Christ supremely loves. Yes, the church with all its defects. It was Saint Cyprian who first said, if you have God for your father, then the church is your mother.
From the very earliest days of the gospel as evinced by the book of Acts, Christians gathered as the church. A program of discipleship which does not have as one of its main names membership and association with a family of believers we call the church.
Church is falling way short of the standards of Jesus in the great commission. One way, perhaps the most important way you grow as a disciple of Christ is in the family of other disciples of Christ.
[23:59] In other words, discipleship in Christ requires engagement with the church. Commitment to the church, not isolation from the church. I worry that in our day where there's a suspicion of institutions, some Christians are very wary of engaging with other Christians in the church, of committing themselves to something they see as being an institution.

But at its most basic level, let me put it starkly, no church, no discipleship in Christ. Baptism.
So much more involved in this word. I wish I had more time to go through it with you. Making disciples means new identity, new family. That's what we're aiming for in Glasgow City Free Church.
Are you ready to make these kind of disciples? Are you ready to be this kind of disciples? A community disciple. But then secondly here and lastly, teaching.
Teaching. Jesus closes off the great commission with the second definition of what it means to make disciples. Teaching them to observe everything I've commanded you. Now, very briefly, there are three things I want to consider with you about this role of teaching.
[25:19] First, notice we are to teach new disciples of Christ. We are to teach new disciples of Christ. They must be taught and we must be very diligent to provide the kind of teaching new disciples of Christ need for nourishment and growth.

Jesus here does not specify a method of teaching. He just says, teach them. Be teachers. Whether it's from the pulpit or in the seminar setting, whether it's a one-to-one or whether it's among a group. If we want to make disciples for Jesus, then we as his more experienced disciples need to teach. And that opens up a question for us, for all of us.
If you are already a disciple of Jesus, it's not a question of if you are teaching anyone. It should be a question of who you are teaching.
And what you are teaching them. Jesus clearly envisages that teaching other believers is an essential part of our own discipleship.
[26:24] And the lessons we teach may be very simple or very profound. They may be as simple as sharing with another person what's going on in your life at the moment, what God is doing, or to help a younger believer learn how to pray.

But Jesus clearly expected us to share the grace he has given us with younger disciples. And so again, I ask the question, what are you teaching and who are you teaching?
If you're not teaching anyone at the moment, then be intentional and resolve to begin. In the second instance, we are to teach new disciples of Jesus those things which he commanded the disciples. Teach them all that I've commanded you. One might ask the question concerning what the church is to teach. And the answer is, as much as Jesus taught to the disciples.
Nothing more, nothing less. Our curriculum is as wide as the Bible. It's going to mean that we're unafraid as the church to teach from anywhere in Scripture.
[27:34] But we're going to be especially interested in the Gospels. Because it's there we hear from Jesus' own mouth, as it were, what he has commanded. We're to teach everything he's commanded.

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We'll hold nothing back. We are to be ashamed as a church of no element of the teaching of Christ. And yes, of course, we can say, well, that's summarized in the golden rule. Love God and love others.
Do unto others as you would have them do to you. What does it mean to love? Why should we love? How can we love?
It's the subject of the whole Bible. And so the church as it teaches, it teaches to the limits of the Bible's teaching. But it goes no further than that.
The church starts to teach things which aren't in Scripture. Then the church ceases to be a church. And it becomes a cult like the JWs or the Mormons.
[28:34] Or a sect like the Seventh-day Adventists. And it ceases to be a biblical church. And then in the third instance, we are to teach new disciples of Jesus to obey.

To obey. Not just to believe. Not just to know. But to obey. Just as Jesus is commanding us to obey the Great Commission. So we are to teach new disciples to obey.
Put into practice the teaching you received. To put into practice the teaching they have received from us. There is to be no such thing as cheat grace discipleship in the kingdom of God.
To be a disciple is not just to learn from Jesus. It is to obey Jesus. And in so doing, to be like Jesus.
But I guess as we close, we need to go back to this fundamental principle.
And that is that the Gospel of Matthew begins with one man. Abraham. Abraham. The father of the Jews. One man. Who was faithful to God and obeyed his call to go.
[29:48] And it ends with people from every nation in the world. Obeying God's commands and being faithful to him.

I do wish I had more time to explore with you the vast dimensions of the Great Commission. And to apply it into 2021 Glasgow City Free Church.
But this is what I want to leave our studies in Matthew. With making disciples and the challenge to make disciples. This is our primary aim in Glasgow City Free Church.
And everything for which we are designed and we want to equip you. So that you can be confident in and able to make disciples for our crucified and risen Lord.
No one excuses. Now all that remains is that we all from the oldest to the youngest of us. Nail our colors to the mast.
[30:50] And when we hear the call of God. Saying whom shall I send. And who will go for us. We all raise our hands. Every one of us and say.

He to my Lord. Send me. Let's pray. There's so much really for us here to take in oh Lord.
But we're struck once again by the wonder. Of the gospel. It all begins with one man. In order to call these a man called Abraham. Who hears your voice.
And leaves. Goes. And it all ends oh Lord. With all the nations. Heeding the good news of Jesus Christ.
And responding to your love. In the cross and resurrection of your son. What an amazing vision. Oh Lord forgive us. Forgive us Lord.
[31:48] For being so self-centered. And not for thinking of the other. Not for thinking of. Of the great need in our world. To hear the good news of Jesus. We. We read in.

In our newspapers. And on our. On the BBC website. And whatever. Chat rooms we're in. Or whatever we're doing. We read in the great pain. That people are going through. In this world right now. We have the answer.
The good news of Jesus Christ. Help us then. To be mission reminded Christians. Mission reminded. Not in the sense of. Of overseas mission. Although we should be. First and foremost.
In the sense of. Who can I tell the gospel to. In my sphere of influence. We ask these things. In Jesus name. Amen.

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