

The Church's Mission

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 16 June 2024

Preacher: Rev Dr Derek Thomas

[0 : 00] Now, there is a precursor to this great commission, and on two occasions in chapter 28 of Matthew, following the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, the women report words of Jesus to the disciples.

You'll see it there in verse 10, for example, of Matthew 28 and verse 10, then Jesus said to them, Do not be afraid. Go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee, and there they will see me.

This is one of the resurrection appearances that Jesus makes to His disciples, not now in Jerusalem, but in Galilee, and Galilee will be significant for the reason that it is often referred to as Galilee of the Gentiles.

So, the disciples make their journey from Jerusalem north into Galilee and to a mountain that has been described to them, and there Jesus appears to them.

And it's significant, it seems to me significant, that Matthew wants to point out to us that when they saw Him, first of all, they worshipped Him.

[1 : 38] It was an instinct, a spiritual instinct, that when they saw the risen Jesus, they worshipped Him. There was no doubt in their minds as to His true identity, that He was, as we considered last evening, when Jesus spoke to the disciples at Caesarea Philippi, Simon Peter said in answer to the question, Who do men say that I am?

Simon Peter had said, You are the Christ, the Son of the living God. He was the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecies concerning the Messiah.

He was the fulfillment of God's redemptive purpose to save His people and bring them to Himself. And when they saw the risen Jesus, the Jesus who had been crucified and buried and rose again from the dead, they worshipped Him.

But Matthew adds this little phrase, But some doubted. They believed, but there was doubt in their belief.

Just as it might be said of us this morning, Lord, I believe, help Thou my unbelief. We believe the promises of God.

[3 : 10] We believe that they are yes and amen in Jesus Christ. But when it comes, when the rubber hits the road, as we say, there is always a measure of doubt.

Like Peter on the waves. And it would only have been Peter who would have said in the boat in the midst of the storm, when they saw Jesus approaching on the Sea of Galilee.

He stepped out in faith on the waters of the Sea of Galilee. And he believed, but then doubt came, and he began to sink.

And I think Matthew wants to end his great gospel that he has written, a gospel that has very Jewish settings to it.

It's written with Jews, converted Jews in mind. And again and again, Matthew wants to show that Jesus is the fulfillment of the Old Testament.

[4 : 19] But he also wants us to see that the fledgling church of the New Testament was a church that had faith. And it was a church that worshipped the Lord Jesus.

But it was also a church comprised of these eleven disciples that had doubt.

It was weak. There was a human element to the church. And Matthew wants us to see that if the church is ever going to survive, let alone grow and flourish and cover the ends of the earth, it will not be by the power of man, but it will be by the power of God.

And so Jesus gives them what we call the Great Commission. These are His final words to the disciples, and there will be some more words at the time of the ascension.

But this is the end of Matthew's gospel. And He comes to them and He says, first of all, that all authority in heaven and earth has been given to Me.

[5 : 46] That's the first thing. All authority in heaven and earth is given to Me. It's a tremendous statement, isn't it?

Jesus is speaking in the context of the reign of Emperor Tiberius. Tiberius had been emperor for most of Jesus' life and would continue to be an emperor for a few more years after Jesus ascends. He was a magnificent emperor with great claims to the expansion of the Roman Empire. There's been a meme recently, I'm told, where men and women are asked, how often do you think about the Roman Empire?

And apparently men think about the Roman Empire every day and women hardly ever think of the Roman Empire. But if you were to ask me, how often do you think of the Roman Empire?

My answer would be every day. Because the New Testament is set in the context of the Roman Empire. You cannot read a single verse of the New Testament and not be aware that this is in the context of the Roman Empire.

[7 : 17] The Roman Empire by this time had spanned the then known world. It would expand further following Jesus' ascension, but as far as the disciples would see.

The whole world, the whole world as they knew it, was governed by this man, Tiberius, this Caesar who sat on his throne in Rome, governing the whole world.

So, this is a phenomenal statement on the part of Jesus that all authority in heaven and earth is given unto me.

Not just some authority, not just spiritual authority, not just authority over the church, but all authority. Every kind of authority.

He holds the whole world in the palms of His hands. Nothing happens without Him willing it to happen and without Him willing it to happen before it happens and without Him willing it to happen in the way that it happens.

[8 : 41] All authority. He sits upon the throne of the universe and governs and rules. You remember perhaps in Philippians and Paul is citing what appears to be a catechetical hymn during that period, that generation from the death of Jesus until the first epistle of the Apostle Paul in the early 50s.

You have 25 years or so where there was no New Testament. And how was the early church going to survive without any New Testament?

What were the things that they were supposed to believe concerning Jesus? And in all likelihood, this is a catechetical hymn that was recited when God's people came together, let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus.

Having this mind among yourselves which is yours in Christ Jesus, who though He was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men and being found in human form.

He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. Therefore, God has highly exalted Him and bestowed on Him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus, every knee should bow in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

[10 : 46] The name that is given to Jesus is the name Lord. Now, in the Greek New Testament, the word for Lord is kurios.

And when the Jews came back from their Babylonian captivity, they had forgotten their Hebrew. A generation had died in captivity, and the younger generation had forgotten their Hebrew.

And the principal language would have been Greek. And so, the Hebrew Old Testament was translated into Greek, the so-called Septuagint.

And when it came to the translation of the divine name, the name that we used to call 200 years ago, in this congregation, in this congregation, they would have called that name Jehovah.

But more recently, scholars insist, though there is some discussion about it, scholars insist that the divine name should be pronounced Yahweh. It was a name that Jews never pronounced.

[11 : 58] It was a name that they never uttered. They were terrified that they would utter it in the wrong manner and blaspheme the name of God. And I have a rabbi, a very orthodox rabbi, who lives next door to me.

And we text back and forth two or three times a week. I'm fascinated by all of the strictures that he cannot put his lights off on Shabbat, so they're on all Friday night, all the house lights are on because he cannot turn them off.

And he was asking me what I was doing in my retirement, and I was telling him that I was currently preaching in a church in Mississippi on Sunday.

And he replied, and for the first time ever, he used the name God, G-O-D, except he couldn't type the name G-O-D.

It was G-D, because he couldn't pronounce it, couldn't say it. So the Jews never uttered this name Yahweh.

[13:16] The name that God gave to Moses in Exodus chapter 3, and then in Exodus chapter 6, because the name sounds very similar to the verb I am, He is the great I am.

He is the one who exists. The problem with idols is, and it's a very considerable problem, is that they actually don't exist. They only exist in the minds of idolaters.

But God is the great I am. He is Yahweh. And when the Greek translation of the Old Testament came to translate, to translate the divine name, Yahweh, it used the word kurios.

So, New Testament Jews especially, who became Christians, when they used the word kurios, they were in fact using the divine name.

They were uttering the divine name of God. At the name of Jesus, every knee should bow, on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is kurios, to the glory of God.

[14:44] God has highly exalted Him, and bestowed upon Him glory. All authority in heaven and earth is given unto me.

There are great powers. In every era, in every generation, in every century, there are great powers. Russia has been threatening America in the last week by bringing one of its nuclear submarines to Cuba within a hundred miles of the United States.

It's a show of strength. It's a demonstration of power. China is doing all kinds of things relative to Taiwan.

Russia has invaded the Ukraine and threatening a third world war. You read your news feeds, and depending on which news feeds that you read, it would drive you into despair.

It would make you very fearful. Who knows what's coming? There are people in the world today, I read, who no longer want to bring children into the world because it's a world that's full of despair.

[16:08] It's a world full of threat. It's a world full of darkness. But Jesus reigns. Jesus rules and reigns.

He sits upon the throne of God. He is the creator and upholder. Of all things, He's the God of providence.

I often say that Romans 8, 28 is a verse that helps me sleep at night. And you know that God works all things together for good to them that love God.

He works all things together for the good of His people. When you live under the umbrella of Romans 8, 28, what do you have?

You have safety. You have security. You have peace. You have the knowledge that God is in complete control.

[17:13] Even in the trials, even in the difficulties, even in the moments of darkness, He is still in control. His finger is always on the button. He's ordering and scrutinizing.

And Jesus is saying about Himself, all authority in heaven and earth has been given to me. Authority over Tiberias.

Authority over the Roman Empire. Authority over Satan. And the powers of darkness. And the prophets. If I were to do a little quiz from the first epistle of John and say, the reason the Son of God appeared was fill in the blank.

Now, you free church people know your Bible, so it's not a fair quiz. But there are all kinds of answers that you could give to that. The reason the Son of God appeared was to save His people, was to lay down His life on behalf of His people.

But that is not what John says. You remember what John says. The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil.

[18:41] To destroy the works of the devil. To undo what occurred in Genesis chapter 3 when Adam and Eve fell and listened to the voice of the serpent.

And from that moment onwards, God's redemptive purpose was to undo what Satan had accomplished. And to bring the seed of the woman that would crush the head of the serpent.

To destroy the works of the devil. All authority in heaven and earth has been given to me. I don't know most of you.

I've never met most of you. I don't know your background. I don't know your current circumstances. I don't know what worries and concerns you brought with you, like a burden on your back, as in Bunyan's Pilgrim's Progress.

But I can tell you this. You will find relief and comfort in the knowledge that all authority has been given to Jesus.

[19 : 55] Who is in control? Who is in ultimate control of the universe? And it's King Jesus. It's not the powers of government.

It's not who occupies 10 Downing Street or wherever the Scottish Prime Minister's office is. I've been away so long I've forgotten.

You may be heading for elections. I think that you are. And you will elect someone by a popular vote.

But it means absolutely nothing in the long term because Jesus is the one who is in control. This is counter-cultural, of course.

But it's the belief of Christians. This is what Christians believe, that Jesus rules and Jesus reigns. These are some of the last words of Jesus where He's commissioning His disciples.

[21 : 05] He's giving them battle orders. And what is it, first of all, that He wants them to know and to understand? That He has all authority.

That you bow. This is why they worshipped Him. Despite their doubts, despite their weakness, despite their frailty, they bowed down and worshipped Him. They called Him Lord.

They recognized that He was the King of kings and Lord of lords, and no one and nothing can stand in His way. His redemptive promises will be fulfilled.

They are yes and amen in Jesus Christ. Paul, when he writes to the Corinthians, says that when they were accusing Him of saying yes, yes, and no, no, and in 2 Corinthians, because of a difficulty in His itinerary that He had to change, and there were detractors in Corinth who were accusing Him of speaking out of both sides of His mouth at the same time.

But He uses this to make a very important point, that in Jesus, everything is yes. He is the fulfillment of everything that the Old Testament had ever prophesied.

[22 : 32] And Jesus is now saying to His disciples, I want you to know this, I want you to understand this, and I want you to live by this knowledge that all authority in heaven and in earth is given to me.

Christian, as you go forward, we're celebrating 200 years, and it is right to remember the past and to trace the line of God's providence in the life of this congregation, but you must also look ahead as you are with plans to expand and plans to plant churches.

And how will you do that? In what strength will you do that? You'll do that in the strength of what Jesus says here, all authority in heaven and earth is given unto me.

You bow before Him, and you worship Him, and you remember that He holds the whole world in the palms of His hands.

Well, then secondly, and forgive me for reminding you of some grammar here, but there is one imperative and there are three participles.

[23 : 55] The imperative is, go therefore. Go therefore. The disciples were not to stay still.

They were not to be parked in neutral. They were not to pull aside into a lay-by and enjoy the privileges of being Christian, saved by grace.

No, there was an imperative. There was a task for them to do, to go, to go into all the world. This is a command.

It's an imperative to go, to go where no man has gone before, to cite a line that some of you are familiar with.

These are eleven disciples. There would be an additional disciple in Acts chapter 1 to replace Judas, but at this point there are eleven disciples, and some of them we know, and some of them we know very little about.

[25 : 10] It's amazing, isn't it, as we think of the choice that Jesus made when He chose the twelve disciples. Some of them were not very powerful.

Some of them will always remain in the background. But all of them, apart from the Apostle John, will be martyrs, crucified, put into a log and sawn in half, all kinds of terrible things would happen to them in their compliance, in their obedience to this command, to go.

There was a task for them to do, to go. To go and make disciples of all nations.

Now, there is an echo here in Matthew.

Matthew begins his gospel in chapter 1 in the very opening verse. In the genealogy of the Lord Jesus, he traces the genealogy of Jesus to Abraham, the son of Abraham.

[26 : 29] Luke will trace him all the way back to Adam. But Matthew has a different point to make. He is the son of Abraham. That his lineage goes back to Abraham.

And what did God say to Abraham in Genesis 12 and expanded it in Genesis 15 and Genesis 17? What did God say? That in him all the nations of the world would be blessed.

All the nations of the world would be blessed. from the very beginning, from the very onset of God's covenant with Abraham. God's purposes were not simply for the Jews.

It was for the nations of the world. And now that the promises of God had found its fulfillment in the Lord Jesus, Jesus is saying to them, it's time.

This is why they're in Galilee and not in Jerusalem because Galilee is Galilee of the Gentiles and there is a task for them to do, to go into all the world, to all the nations of the world.

[27 : 51] It's amazing, isn't it, that within just a few years, within 20, 25 years, this promise had been more or less fulfilled in terms of what the world was in the mindset of the first century Christian.

The gospel had spread throughout the Roman Empire. Incredible. in a generation, in 25 years, it had gone into all the world.

Churches had been planted in Galatia, in Thessalonica, in Ephesus, in Corinth, in Rome, and beyond. And we think we know that Paul was in Spain expanding the gospel.

I don't think he came to Britain, although there are stories that that happened, but there's absolutely no evidence of that. But eventually the gospel came to Britain and to Scotland.

Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations. That's the imperative. In 45 years of ministry, I have discovered that there are some section of a church who are always interested in missions.

[29 : 23] It's a small group of people, and they have a great deal of energy, and they have a great deal of excitement about missions.

But my dear friend, it ought to be at the very forefront of every Christian to be excited about missions, about fulfilling this command to go and make disciples of all nations.

Things may be difficult in Scotland right now, as they are in North America and in Europe. But my dear friend, if you were to go to South America, or if you were to go to China, or if you were to go to other countries in the world where the gospel is expanding and growing in considerable ways, go and make disciples of all nations.

Now, there are three participles. Baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit.

It's very interesting, isn't it? Baptizing them. The rite of baptism is an important part of testifying what a Christian is.

[31 : 02] And it's interesting that he would introduce the idea of baptism because baptism is a churchly function. Baptism is something that is conducted within the orbit of the organized church.

That's embryonic here in Matthew 28, but as the New Testament progresses, it becomes evident that baptism is something that is done within the context of a church. So, the subtext of what Jesus is saying here is, I want you to go and plant churches.

Not to randomly go and baptize this one and that one, but as the New Testament progresses and the structure of the church develops, the subtext of what Jesus is saying is, I want you to go and plant churches.

I'm very impressed by what you're doing here. And the church that I've just retired from has planted several churches over the course of the last 50 years.

And it is the future, it is the absolute necessity. If the church is to grow, we need to plant churches. And baptizing them, baptism is not an option for the church.

[32 : 31] It is a requirement. And baptizing them into the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Fascinating, isn't it, that the disciples said, are there now three gods?

They couldn't have, they couldn't have recited the doctrine of the Trinity as that was put forth in the Council of Nicaea in 325 in very precise terms.

No, they probably couldn't have done that. But they already realized that there is only one God, but there is more than one who is that one God.

The Father is God, and the Son is God, and the Holy Spirit is God. And the church would have to wrestle with that for until 325 at the Council of Nicaea to bring forth a doctrine of the Holy Trinity, baptizing them in the name.

Interesting, isn't it, it's in the singular, not in the names. I have young ministers who've graduated that I've had in my class, and I've gone to one of their services, and there's been a baptism, and they're baptizing them in the name of the Father, and in the name of the Son, and in the name of the Holy Spirit, and I want to stand up and say, no, that's three baptisms, and there's only one baptism.

[34 : 12] It's one baptism in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, signifying that we are in union and communion with the Trinity.

We serve this one God of whom Jesus is a person within that Trinity, baptizing them.

This churchly function, well, the second participle is, well, the first participle is to make disciples of all nations.

The second participle is to baptize them in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and the third participle is to teach them to observe all that I have commanded you. To teach them to observe all that I have commanded you.

the Great Commission tells us that we are to teach because people are ignorant.

[35 : 25] The world is ignorant, ignorant of God, ignorant of truth, ignorant of how one needs to be saved, ignorant of their condition, that they are dead in trespasses and in sins, ignorant of the way of salvation in Christ alone, by faith alone, apart from the works of the law.

That's part of the great commitment of the church, isn't it? To teach, to expound all the things that Jesus has commanded.

And as those things now have been written down in the New Testament, as apostles like Paul and Peter and John have expanded the teachings of the Lord Jesus, that's the Great Commission, to teach.

Teach them to observe all that I have commanded you. And then the third statement that he makes, and lo, behold, I am with you always to the end of the age.

I am with you always to the end of the age. He is Emmanuel, God with us. In every circumstance, in every trial, in every difficulty, if you are a Christian this morning, if you believe in the Lord Jesus, if you've taken Him as your Lord and Savior and you bowed to Him, God has quickened your heart and given you a new heart to believe, there's a promise.

[37 : 27] I am with you always, Jesus says, to the end of the age. Not just simply to the end of the lifetime of the apostles, but to the end of the age.

It's an eschatological expression. It's a reference to the time when Jesus will come again and bring about the new heavens and new earth where we will dwell in glory and beauty forever.

But we are not there yet. We're still on the pilgrim path that leads to glory. There are days when the clouds gather.

there are days that our spirits grow weary. We need to find strength and here's something that will strengthen you.

I am with you always. I will never leave you nor forsake you. That's His promise. And as this congregation attempts to make an impact in obedience to the commission of the Lord Jesus in the city of Glasgow and beyond.

[38 : 42] That's the promise that Jesus has given to you that I am with you in all your efforts in all your strivings in all your plannings I am with you always to the end of the age.

It's a wonderful marvelous promise.