

TRINITY LECTURE 3 - Who said the Great Commission was great? - A Biblical and Historical reconsideration

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[0:00] I want to start off just by telling you what I hope you'll walk out the door with, okay? I'm into education, doing some study in education, and I'm involved in encouraging theological education.

One of the great sadnesses, I think, in theological education, certainly in Australia, and I have a few hats I put on, one of which is to do with theological education in Australia, with some of the colleges around, and we don't always get the action stage really clear.

You know, it's possible for us just to think stuff and just to say stuff but not to do stuff. And I always want to be pretty clear when I'm preaching and teaching that when you walk out the door, you'll be a different person.

That's my goal. So let me tell you the kind of different person I want you to be. You won't be too surprised by this. I want you to be inspired afresh to read your Bible.

Now, I'm guessing people who show up to a thing called the Trinity Lectures, you know, are probably long-in-the-tooth Bible readers, consumers of sermons and Bible study type people.

[1:11] And I know that it's possible to just get into a kind of a rut in your thinking. One of the really delightful conversations I had just yesterday with a Bible teacher was where he said, you know, I'm going to teach on this passage.

And there's this one little phrase in 1 Corinthians. And I've been spending years thinking about what this, because it's just not the way we usually talk. And I said, you know, that's exactly my feeling on exactly that verse.

And he said, and I read all the commentaries, and none of them commented on this little phrase.

Now, I just thought that was so exciting. Here's a Bible teacher. Here's somebody who's long in the tooth at studying the scriptures.

But he was coming fresh all the time saying, what is it saying to us? And why is it not exactly how I thought it would be? And let me just tell you, that's a little clue for interpreting the scriptures.

One of the best things you can do for yourself is to say, if I was writing this, what would I write? And then go, oh, that's not what Paul wrote or Matthew wrote or Moses wrote. So why did they write that when I would have said it differently?

[2:14] And that's just a handy little kind of interpretation tool. So I hope as you leave tonight, you'll go, I'm going to do it afresh. I'm going to look at the scriptures in a slightly different, fresh, I'm not going to get just stale and in a rut.

So that's the first thing I'd love to see happen. I guess you could say these things of any Bible talk at that time, couldn't you? But this is, I want to just throw it out to you. It's also a little bit defensive, but I'll explain why I'm being a bit defensive to start in a moment.

The other thing is, I hope you walk out the door delighting in God more. Do you hear that sort of language? Sometimes we just think in terms of serving God. Sometimes we just think in terms of doing what he says.

But I don't think that's enough in the Christian life. If the language we use of the relationship that we have with God, it means anything, then it ought to be including language like delight, joy, thrill, pleasure in the relationship.

And so I hope as you leave, you'll be going, you know, I'm just going to delight in God some more.

That's part of what you do as you go out those doors. The other thing I'm hoping is that you'll just have a little bit crisper tuning to your mind about God's mission in this world and therefore how he wants you to live.

[3 : 35] We can, we should say these things at the end of any talk, shouldn't we? But that's what I'm hoping for you tonight. And I'm hoping that you'll be more committed, both intellectually but also practically, in whatever way is appropriate for you.

And I'm not going to decide that one. That's between you and God. But in whatever way is appropriate for you, that you'll be more committed to God's mission in this world. I'm guessing, I didn't hear the talk last night from Chris Wright, but I'm guessing that was part of his theme because I've heard him speak in other contexts before.

Now I say these things, I'm going to be a little defensive here, because what I want to start off right at the start is by saying, I love the Lord, okay? And I love teaching the scriptures, and I love getting the scriptures clear, and I want you to go out with that perspective.

I say all this to begin because I want to also challenge a phrase that we are so used to hearing that we almost can't even re-examine it.

And yet that's what we're doing tonight. We're going to re-examine this concept of the Great Commission. Why do we even talk about it as the Great Commission? Why do we think of it? Why do we use the phrase so often in our discussion about mission?

[4 : 48] And so I'm going to ask us to re-examine that stuff, not to unsettle, not to rip a page out of our Bible. That's not where we're headed tonight. You know, relax. I remember giving this talk one time, and I wasn't introduced as a friendly guy.

And so everybody in the congregation, I was going to have challenging ideas. I was in front of a theological college, so I thought that was reasonable, challenging some ideas. I actually ended up very orthodox, I thought. You know, I was banking on the Bible.

But halfway through, I could see the look on these people's faces, and they're thinking, oh, no, who is giving this talk? Well, can I just, in my own defense, say I love the Lord, love the Bible, want to teach it better.

We're not going to rip any pages out. We're going to weigh up stuff. We're going to re-examine. And I hope you'll walk out loving the Lord more because we do it.

So that's my introduction. I have three major headings for this evening. What time am I supposed to stop, Paul? Because I do get excited, and I do tend to go on when I get excited, but I'm very disciplined if I'm given a time.

[5 : 50] 9.15? 9 o'clock? What do we advertise at? 5 or 10 past. Guaranteed. First thing I want to do is tell you some underlying principles.

Before we even dive into this re-examination of the phrase, the Great Commission, and the verses at the end of Matthew's Gospel, I want to give you some underlying principles. Again, this is a little defensive of me here, because I want you to understand why I'm saying the things I'm saying before we actually jump in and do this.

The first underlying principle is this, and it has to do with the way church functions. It has to do with the way we talk about things in society generally, but in church.

The first underlying principle is that clichés rob us of richness in language. Now, clichés are kind of handy sometimes, you know.

They do summarize things. They make it easy for us. You know, if somebody says, she's in love, and they're talking about that 25-year-old young woman in church that's sort of floating around up the back there, you know, and they say, oh, yeah, she's in love.

[7 : 01] There's a cliché. We know exactly what's going on there. We can understand now why there's that perpetual smile on her face. But then clichés also come in at all sorts of other levels.

I don't know if you listen to teenagers much. I have a couple in my home, so I get all this teen speak that I'm kind of coming to terms with all the time. And it's very perplexing for an old guy like me, you know.

My daughter, for example, 20-year-old, says things like, oh, I went to hear this talk, and I'm pretty much in love with that bishop now. I'm going, what? What? I'm in love with him.

What? Like, that's not what she means. What she means is I really appreciated the talk. You know, or he's someone that I can admire, and I learn a lot from.

No, no, that's not the phrase she used. I'm pretty much in love with him now. And my wife and I look and go, language has shifted, hasn't it? You know, this whole way of speaking. And so clichés work for us and don't work for us, and they have their place and they don't have their place.

[8 : 03] The problem with clichés, where we'll just use that phrase again and again and again, is that it robs us of the value of what we're really talking about.

It takes away the richness of language. We revert to clichés. You won't be surprised to hear I'm suggesting we use the phrase the Great Commission as a cliché.

That's part of where I'm heading tonight. What I want to do tonight is stop the cliché. Anybody here got students doing the VCE? I've just had a couple.

You might know what I'm doing. If they're studying English at a high level, I've just spent, you know, a couple of daughters just finished the HSC up in New South Wales there. And they have this concept of deconstructing a text.

Are people familiar with that idea? It's where you get a phrase and you kind of, what's it really saying? And you pull it apart and you understand it from different people's perspectives. That's a technical kind of language, linguistic idea.

[9 : 01] You deconstruct the text. Well, if it means anything to you, that's sort of what we're doing tonight, deconstructing this phrase, the Great Commission. We're going to look at it from different angles. Why do people use it the way they do?

Why does it have such meaning in certain contexts? Now, I raise this particular instance, but I would like to suggest to you that lots of our church activity is clichéd.

And as a pastor, I just think that's a heartbreaking thing to see, where small group Bible studies can't really wrestle with the topic because a couple of clichés get popped in to the conversation.

And the conversation just slows down because, yes, of course we have to agree to that. That's a real danger in church life. Real danger that things that sometimes have a very rich meaning are actually lessened in their value.

And I would just challenge you generally in your church life, don't settle for clichés. Keep coming afresh. You know, as I read the scriptures, and I naturally read it many, many times, as I read it again and again, it is so enjoyable if you don't let your cliché dump on it, but you allow it to speak to you.

[10 : 14] That is an enjoyable thing for a disciple. And I hope you have that enjoyment. I hope you don't bring your theological grid to the text, but you build your grid out of the text.

And there's an enormous difference in that process. And it has to do with the way we operate with clichés. The particular cliché I'm suggesting to you, this Great Commission, I was alerted to, I was in India.

I'm in one of those jobs that I get to travel the world. Oh, I love saying that. I get to travel the world. And it is such a privilege to go to colleges and see the ministries, and in my role to then work with principals and boards of colleges on their strategic plans.

You know, we don't just give money. We actually are engaged in helping them build their college life and their community and those sorts of things. And so I'm always listening to lots of different accents, which I, you know, quite enjoy, and lots of different perspectives on life and church.

I mean, just all sorts of little things. I'll give you one example. I was in Indonesia. I'll get back to my India story in a minute. I was in Indonesia, and I was talking to the principal of the college there, and they have a very strong anti-Pentecostal theology.

[11 : 27] Like, Pentecostal, you know, it's just not what they do. Anyone Pentecostal here? It's okay. It's okay. It's okay. We love you. The Lord loves you. Okay, and, but then as he goes on, he says, tells me all the stories about how they talk about casting out demons in their ministry.

And I said, so you're anti-Pentecostal, but you're casting out demons. He said, of course, because people are demon-possessed. So I go, well, what does Pentecostal mean? He says, well, that's, that's not that stuff.

Pentecostal in this context is, is a prosperity doctrine that says if you are blessed by God, then you are blessed materially, and we ignore heaven. I mean, that's for them what they're against.

So I go, well, I can be against that one too. I don't think that's a biblical concept. And so, you know, people use words and phrases and ideas in different ways. And I'm very used to asking the question, what do you mean by that?

Because in my context, it means this. And I'm fairly cautious as a person to not misinterpret what I'm hearing. A big part of my job is to listen all the time.

[12 : 28] What is it actually in your context meaning? So given that little bit of background I've just given you, I was in India. And I was listening to this guy, and he was saying something. And he

used this phrase on the Great Commission.

And he said, you know, we Christians here, we're Great Commission Christians. And I thought that's an extraordinary thing to hear in this context. Because it sounded very like what I would hear back in Australia.

And the very sameness of it made me think that's odd. And I started questioning, well, what's going on? Where did that language come from? Such that an Indian Christian would say that.

Whereas very often, you know, lots of the language and way of discussing the faith and discipleship and the issues that they're dealing with as pastors, those things are often, you know, very different from what we've got back here. One of the big issues in pastoral ministry here is how do you minister to affluence?

There, it's how do you minister to poverty? Here, it's, you know, how do we get people so that they're engaged with the church? Over there, it's sometimes how do we get them engaged outside of the church and away from, you know, all sorts of differences.

[13 : 33] So to hear this almost identical sort of phrase to what I would hear in Australia, I thought there's something cliché going on here worldwide. That was my thought.

There's something worldwide happening. Why would it be? And I started to wonder if we had a cliché of the first magnitude operating in the church worldwide amongst evangelical believers. An intercontinental cliché. That's what I thought. So that's my first underlying principle. It's about clichés and about a little bit about the history of why I'm actually talking on this topic. My second underlying principle is this, that there are a whole stack of things that can motivate us as Christian people.

I discovered this in parish ministry in all sorts of different ways. You know, people with different gifts get motivated in different ways. Most pastor teachers, most guys up the front, you know, preachers up the front, have a set of gifts.

It's often teaching, nearly always. Sometimes pastoring, leadership, sometimes evangelism. That tends to be the cluster.

[14 : 46] And those people tend to be motivated by a certain set of concepts in the Bible, certain ways of thinking about life. And I just had a little suspicion when I was in church and preaching regularly in the one place, that not everybody in the pew was like that, because I was reading passages in the scriptures about the different gifts we have.

Now, there's a priority, I think, in the scriptures on the word gifts, teaching the scriptures, evangelism, prophets and apostles, from the Ephesians 4 passage, if you know. And I started to think, okay, God will motivate people with different gifts in different ways from the pastor teacher. And my anxiety came that I was a pastor teacher, and maybe I was trying to motivate everybody the way I get motivated, which if that's the case, and they're motivated by something different God will do in their life, then that'll be a disaster, because I'll be just talking to them as though they're all pastor teachers.

But, you know, if you hang around the Bible college, theological college for four years or something, then everyone you're talking to is motivated by the same stuff. So there's a little hothouse of motivation in that sort of area.

And I started to notice that people with the gift of mercy, you know, the people who are just fantastic in the nursing homes, we would have people go out, and they're just the most beautiful people ministering to the frail and aged.

[16 : 06] And I'd come in and take a little communion service, you know, and they'd say, oh, thank you for leading this ministry. I'd say, well, this is actually your ministry. You know, I'm just helping you.

This is the reality of this, because they are the people who are connecting and using their gifts so wonderfully in the nursing homes where we were. And I started to realize when I preached on passages to do with mercy and God's love for people, no matter who they are, and the concepts like that we're all made in the image of God, you just see these people with the gift of mercy and their little tears would be in their foreheads, you know, on their cheeks, rather.

And their eyes would open up. And when they were coming out of the service, they'd shake your hand and say, oh, that's the sermon. I hope everybody heard that one. You know, that sort of idea. And then the next week when you teach on evangelism, you just see these little eyes look up.

The people who had the gift of evangelism would get something, they'd come out and shake your hand. Oh, we all needed that one, Rector. That's the one for us. Oh, have everyone heard that? And I started to notice this little pattern that different Bible concepts would motivate different giftedness.

And the Great Commission, I think, has a very singular kind of feel to it. I think it's a motivator for some in the way it's structured.

[17:31] I guess if I was going to be a bit naughty, I'd say the Great Commission has got a very bossy feel to it, doesn't it? You know, don't misunderstand me here, but, you know, all authority has been given to me.

What glorious words from our risen Lord Jesus. But if you'd ask yourself, what kind of words are these? Well, our command language. It's language which is teach, disciple.

And I think, you know, mission leaders who want everybody to go and do stuff get kind of motivated by that. And they see it and it matters to them and they want it to matter to everybody.

And Bible teachers look at that and they go, look, it's about teaching and that's what I do and let's all go and do it. And I just think that as we reflect across the whole scriptures, we ought to be sensitive to all the different things that will motivate and not just keep coming back to what I'm suggesting has become a bit of a cliché.

Now, remember, I'm not going to rip these pages out and I'm going to come to the point of how glorious these words are. That's coming. But let's just soften up the idea here. Underlying principles.

[18:40] The different things motivate different people to serve the Lord, to live for him, to please him in their Christian life. And my anxiety in all this is that I think we tend to feed our Christian churches just a very narrow band of motivators.

And then that rolls on to my last underlying principle. There's three underlying principles. And the third one is that the scriptures have got so many wonderful themes. And what I don't want is for you to miss out on them. You know, I don't want me to be keep saying the same old thing again and again, not because it was wrong the first time or the fifth time, but there's more to say.

There are so many wonderful themes in here that will motivate us to get out into this world, to focus on the world, to think about the world, to serve God in this world. But what a pity it is if we only ever get one theme again and again, this cliché I'm suggesting.

Now, there are so many great themes. I think that's a bit obvious. But I want to directly draw our attention now to this passage at the end of Matthew 28. And this is my second point.

And that is the dominance of this passage in the way people think about mission. And as a leader of a mission which tries to empower theological education, interpreting the scriptures and understanding the balance of it all is dear to my heart.

[20:01] And so I want to dive in just to these last verses. Can I read them to you? Matthew 28, verses 16. They're probably so well known to you, your audience especially, those that will show up to a lecture, that I probably don't need to read them, but let's do it anyway and note what's there.

Matthew 28, 16. Then the 11 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've commanded you.

And surely I'll be with you always to the very end of the age. These are glorious words. And if you're going to understand Matthew's gospel, you've got to understand them. It is the most fitting and wonderful end to the gospel.

It just hangs theme after theme that Matthew has been developing through the book, hang together in these words. And that is a valuable study in itself to say, why is it these verses are so perfect for the passage?

[21:16] Matthew has drawn so much together. But now how is this passage used in preachers, in preaching about mission?

Tragically, too much emphasis is put on the word go. Those of you who have done a bit of Greek study, you'll know that there is only one main verb here, and that is the discipling.

It's not even make disciples, it's kind of disciple is the idea. And the other verbs around it, the go and the baptize and the teach, those things all hang off that main one of discipling.

And so many commentators, this is not, you know, Stuart's little private interpreter, many commentators will point that out. And they'll say, well, you know, you can't really use this text to say, you know, you there should go and make disciples.

Because that's just not actually how the sentence hangs together in its original. It's a secondary concept. But I fear there are many sermons, and you may have heard them.

[22 : 14] You might have even given little talks on them yourself, where the going is emphasized. Well, that's worth noticing. That's worth noticing. Just as the perfection of these last few verses within the context of Matthew is worth noticing.

But I want to say more than that. I want to suggest to you that there is an assumption about these verses that I want to challenge in terms of how significant they've been in the church's life for the last 2,000 years.

Church history is one of my interests. I've got lots of interests, studied in lots of fields, but church history is one of them. And I would think that if you were just to ask people, you know, what has motivated the church's mission, most Bible-literate Christians would jump back to these verses and say, well, you know, that's what Christians have hung their hat on for two millennia now.

The reality is that's, in fact, not true. It's only the last couple of hundred years that people actually emphasized these verses. Isn't that interesting? The first 1,800 years, the church grew and expanded, continent by continent, without making, you know, they read the verse, they quoted the verse, but didn't make as much of it as the last 200 years.

Isn't that interesting? And I would think that would be a surprise to many of you. This has not been the verses that have compelled the church to go and take the gospel.

[23 : 35] They've done it, but not based on these verses. Have I said that enough different ways for you to get the point? And it's just, it's quite a surprise, I think, for most people, because, you know, you could pick up a lot of sermons that would start off, and these are the verses that the church has driven out.

You could read books even that start off this way. You know, let's now see how these words were fulfilled by the generations of Christians years later. And yet they weren't the verses that actually motivated them to do it.

The last couple of hundred years associated with the expansion of Christians from Western Europe, a couple of hundred years ago, into other parts, Africa and Asia in particular.

These verses have become significant. And even more particularly in the last 30, 40 years, under a couple of major movements of Christians, one called the Lausanne movement.

Lausanne's a lovely little city. I haven't been there, but a lovely little city in Switzerland. There was a big conference there in 1974. And lots of Christian leaders. Billy Graham, the main leader in the Americans, evangelist, and John Stott, the main leader in England, the great teacher.

[24 : 37] Great evangelical leaders. Hundreds of people came together and they started talking about this and saying, we must now fulfill this. And so the last 30, 40 years, this verse, these couple of verses, have become far more significant on the agenda of Christians.

And so now there are dozens of books written on the Great Commission, fulfilling the Great Commission, how to fulfill the Great Commission, the church and the Great Commission, university Christian groups and the Great Commission. The Great Commission, it's all over the place.

And that is an upswing of 200 years and more particularly 30, 40, 50 years. That's a bit of information that you may not have had before. Should these verses dominate the way we talk about mission?

I'm going to suggest to you, no, they shouldn't. Should they be taken out of the Bible? No, they shouldn't be taken out of the Bible. Should we still love these verses? Yes, we should still love these verses, but should they be the ones we talk about most of the time? No, is my suggestion to you.

We should talk about them as often as we talk about other parts of the scriptures. So instead of it being the usual sermon, it will be one of 50 sermons that we give on mission. As we think about it, the modality of the go out and do this and the teaching and that sort of way of talking should be one of 50 sermons.

[25 : 52] Remember my principles? We don't have cliches. We want to enjoy all the themes of the scriptures. There are many things that will motivate different people. What is interesting, you know, these verses, they're not quoted elsewhere in the Bible.

Isn't that interesting? Because, you know, the book of Acts, the guys in the book of Acts, the apostles as the church, the early churches there, they were not quoting this verse back at themselves and enthusing each other with that verse.

That's just not what happens. Lots of other passages are quoted. Lots of the stories of Jesus, his death especially, comes up again and again in the New Testament, in Acts and in the writings of Paul and Peter.

Different stories of his life. Lots of Old Testament ideas are brought in again and again. But these verses aren't quoted again and again. They don't dominate the way the church. When Paul talked about his mission, he didn't quote these verses.

Christian leaders through the first 1800 years, of course they made reference to the passages from time to time, but not much. Come the second century, you look at the major writers of the second century, they hardly make reference to it.

[26 : 57] There's a very famous book from the early fourth century called Eusebius. He's the writer, the history of the Christian church. And he gives this huge sweep of the Christian church and all that had done up to that period, you know, like 400, from the first century to 400.

And he doesn't begin with these verses. In fact, I only found one reference in the whole thing, and that was on page 68 of my little edition of, you know, four or five hundred pages of book.

And he mentions it and just moves on. So it's there. He's not unaware of it. He doesn't dislike it.

This is not about not liking these verses, but it's about having it in a context. And so here is this early church writer, summing up the first 400 years, writing at the time, summing up the first 400 years of the church's life and expansion and growth and what it did.

And this is not the dominant verse. Isn't that interesting? Quite stunning, really, given the emphasis these days on these phrases. In fact, apart from the last 200 years, the only person in church history that I've been able to discover, I've not done an exhaustive study of every book, mind you, but I've read many who have kind of made coin on all this stuff.

But the only one is a guy called Erasmus. Erasmus was a 16th century reformer, Catholic scholar, and he parted company.

[28 : 19] He fought in dialoguing debate with Martin Luther. You might have heard of Luther more as the founder of the Reformation. Well, Erasmus in his own way was a reformer, but stayed within the church.

And Erasmus made a lot of these verses. And he said, you know, secretly what was happening in the book of Acts was that they were living out these verses. The difficulty with that is that there's no proof in the book of Acts that that's what they were doing.

And so he had to kind of revert to this argument that it was kind of subliminal. It was just so part and parcel of what they were doing. My argument is, it was so subliminal they don't even comment on it. It was so subliminal they didn't then teach it to the next generation of Christian leaders that come up in the second century.

That just seems like an argument he's manufactured. That's the only writer that I could find that made much of this set of verses. outside its context in Matthew's gospel.

The dominance of these verses in our thinking. And I would want to suggest to you that mission has been motivated by many, many other ideas. In Eusebius, for example, just reading through there, two main things jump out at me there.

[29 : 25] One is this idea of the gospel going up, much more Lucan, much more book of Acts kind of thing, that the gospel, the word spreads out. And the other thing that dominates here is not about the action of people at all, but about the great grace of God that is making all this happen.

That's his perspective on the church's growth. It's not about what people are doing so much, but how good God is in the people, in growing the church and doing things, pouring out his grace. So that's my second point, the dominance of these passages and the surprising lack of significance for 1,800 years as the major motivator for mission.

So now, what do we do with all this? Okay, I've kind of deconstructed, I've pulled things apart, I've said to you, let's not emphasize this so much. What do we do with it? Well, what I want you to do is take this little germ of an idea and reflect more intentionally about mission in the scriptures.

I want you to note what I've been saying and stop using the phrase. Can I ask you not to use the phrase, the Great Commission, for like a year? Would that be all right? Don't stop believing it, you know, because it's there, it's Matthew, it's the word of God, but just don't use it.

I think it would be great to have a moratorium right around the world on using the phrase, the Great Commission, and then that would force people, force preachers, force mission leaders to go and look at a whole mass of other themes because that's what I think we're missing out on by the cliché. [30 : 53] The vast richness of the scriptures declares the mission of God right through the word. So don't just reduce everything back to this idea.

That's a technical philosophical term, reductionism. Have you come across that idea? That you get all these things and you just reduce them back to one concept, a reductionistic philosophy. I fear that's what we have in the church around the topic of mission. And what happens, I think, is we lose people because they're not motivated by these kinds of verses. They may nod and say, yes, they're there, yes, we believe, yes, they're true, but they don't grip the person. Just like different gifted ones are motivated by different concepts in the scriptures. So too, we miss out on the energy and vitality of mission by just saying the same old clichés all the time. And so this leads me on, my desire is that you'd not reduce, but that you'd be a better Bible reader.

[31 : 54] I want you to come back to the scriptures and say, well, okay, if we're not going to just keep piling back into the same little phrase, let's look and see what it says because there's so much there about mission, so much about the God who loves this world, so much about what God intends for this world and how we can participate in that, how we ought to think about that.

You know, I worry that one of the implications of always just using this little cliché is that you go, well, I'm not a missionary, I'm not called to be a missionary, that's it. Leave it to those who are called. Well, that's a pretty tiny band of Christians.

And if our only attitude to mission is, well, that's not me, we've really missed out on being disciples because God includes and intends for all of us to be engaged in his mission, certainly.

So be a better reader of the scriptures. Embrace the different biblical expressions. This goes across for everything, really, in your Bible reading. You know, keep looking at the diversity.

One of the great thrills for me in studying theology all those years ago, 20-something years ago at Moore College, was discovering the four different Gospels. Have you even noticed there are four of them? Have you noticed? Well, of course you have.

[33 : 06] You've memorized the order that they're in. You know, Matthew, Mark, why are there four and why are they different? What does that actually mean in the way we think about them? Most of us do what was done in the second century.

We do a kind of a melding of them. There was, in the ancient church, there was this thing called the diatessaron. It means through four. In other words, we'll read through four Gospels as though they're really one Gospel.

So we'll take a page out of here and a page out of there and we'll put it all together and we'll read that in the church year by year. That's what they did, the diatessaron. And we do that, I think, to our lack, to our loss.

Much better if we could get the Gospel of Luke and understand Luke and then compare it to Matthew and go, well, why is he different? What does that tell us about the variety of the God that delivers this information to us?

What does that tell us about the Lord Jesus is that we need four stories? Not the same story four times, but four stories, four different angles. It's a thrill. I tell you, you think you've been sitting in a pew for ages.

[34 : 03] If you haven't really reflect on that, there's your homework for the next year. Don't use the word Great Commission and read the four Gospels again and again. I'm good at homework giving. So that's part of the diversity of the Scriptures.

And same too with this theme on mission. Come back to the Scriptures and read it and say, now, what is this saying? And don't use the clichés. Just on this mission, read the last chapter of each Gospel and ask yourself, why is it that the sending out is so different in all four?

What does that tell us? That at the back end of each of these Gospels, we're actually communicated in different ways, different ways of thinking, different ways of speaking.

You'll find that a really enjoyable exercise if you're a Bible reader. And then my last, of my last point, my exploring other ways of thinking is my third point. And then, to be better motivated at discovering what God's mission is and your part in it.

See, this is the danger. If we limit it down, we know it doesn't touch us. Because I'm not going to go over to that country. Well, maybe one or two of you are. You should get it going.

[35 : 15] But many of us will not, you see. Most of us will not. And so we don't connect with the mission of God. That's the danger. And I want you all connected with the mission of God.

And you've got to discover where it is you'll connect with it. Not just command, go and do this. The Bible does command us.

We're not going to tear commands out all of a sudden. But that's not the only thing it does. And I guess this is where I started, how I want you to leave the building tonight, how I want you to walk out there, is I want you to get the thrill of the breadth of the scriptures.

And to see what is there. I read this one little book, just skimmed through it when I was researching for this talk. And the book was called Churches That Obey the Great Commission.

And what it was, it was about 30 different churches where the senior pastor of the church wrote, you know, like 10 pages on each of them on their church. And they're from all around the world, a couple in Australia, but, you know, Korea and Africa and England and all over the place.

[36 : 21] And what I was interested in, you see, was just the way that title of the book suggested something. Churches That Obey. Implication, there's a whole bunch that aren't and they're bad.

So when I actually read through, skimmed through the 30 churches, some of which I actually knew about more than was in the book, what was really interesting to me was that there are only two of those chapters that actually made reference to the Great Commission as a motivator to what they were doing.

28 out of 30 didn't. So, you know, you could have come up with a different title to that book. It could have been churches that love their community, churches that understand the mission of God, churches that are really doing some great stuff.

You could have come up with masses of different titles, but there was this cliché that was, I felt it was almost an obnoxious title was my reaction to it, churches that obey.

And the churches themselves didn't, they wrote chapters in the book because they'd been invited to, presumably, but they didn't actually get motivated by those verses. Isn't that an interesting thing to do? To have an editorial overlay on the passage, of that passage, onto those churches' experiences.

[37 : 38] And so, just as we have here a command kind of, driving kind of concept in the Great Commission, so too, I want you to discover some of the attractional views of mission in the scriptures.

the extraordinary delight of knowing the God who made us. To understand the Trinity, the Father, Son and Spirit and the divine love that we are invited into.

Have you thought of the Christian life like that? That's what, that's John's perception of it. There is this divine love going on. Just incidentally, I've got another minute and it's controversially, you know, moment.

One of the enormous difference between Islam and Christianity is who God is. Both are monotheist, but one is monotheistic and simple, the other is monotheistic and complex.

It's Trinitarian. Listen to people who actually live in India about the caste system. It's not just a, you know, a way of living. It is an oppression for hundreds of millions of people.

[38 : 37] It gives them no opportunities in life. Religion after religion is like that. It is dehumanizing because it's not linked to life, Christ himself. And so discover that about mission.

That there is an evil to combat. And that will motivate some of us. Or the beauty of God. You know, we're lousy at aesthetic appreciation of God in the church, generally the evangelical church.

It's one of the great tragedies that we can actually think about God. We always rush off onto these kind of very austere or very staid kind of models.

But you know, the beauty, the appreciation, the delight in God. God. That is such a wonderful thing that we've got to capture and grip our hearts so that we truly want to worship and delight in him.

There's some major themes in the scriptures about mission. And my great hope is that you will reject clichés in this and in all your Christian life.

[39 : 38] My hope is that you will discover the things that motivate you and others from the scriptures and that you'll connect with the mission of God in a way which is fresh and real and that you'll walk out this building delighting in God more.

Let's pray. Gracious Father, thank you for revealing yourself to us. We thank you for the inspired words from Matthew. We thank you for these words that Jesus proclaimed and just how glorious they are.

We give you thanks for them. And also, Father, we thank you for the rest of the scriptures. We thank you, Father, that you include us in your mission. You motivate us in so many different ways. And we ask, Father, that we might be motivated by the great variety of what's in scripture. Help us, Father, to connect to you, to your mission, to your world. Help us, Father, to delight in you, to fight against evil, and to see this world become your world.

In Christ's name we pray. Amen. Amen.