

More of Melbourne for Christ

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- [0 : 0 0] Well, last year we kicked off with a theme of Persist in Prayer, which, by the way, we sort of keep praying this year too. But this year I want to encourage us to renew our efforts to share the gospel, that we might see more of Melbourne and beyond, one for Christ.
- But why? Why does it matter that we share the good news of Jesus? In fact, if someone asked you why I share the good news of Jesus, I wonder what you would say.
- There are a number of reasons, and so why don't you take a moment to turn to the person next to you and see if you can answer that question on the screen, why I share the good news of Jesus. You've got about 30 seconds. Over to you.
- All right, that'll do. So, I wonder what you came up with after you said, hi, my name is Mark. Remember, that's what we're going to do after the service.
- I wonder what reasons you came up with. Was it out of love for them, like family and friends whom you love, and so you want to see them saved for their good? And it is for our good, isn't it?
- [1 : 1 6] Was it because we should have a heart like God's, who's concerned to see all the lost saved?
- That's what we heard from our first reading, which many of us looked at with Jonah last week. Or perhaps it's because we're told to, which is part of our passage this week.
- But I wonder if any of you said, so more people might honour Jesus as Lord. Because that's actually the big reason in our passage today.
- But first, the context. So, point one, verse 16 and 17. When the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had told them to go. When they saw him, they worshipped him.
- But some doubted. Now, Jesus has just been risen from the dead. Earlier, he had told them to go to Galilee, to this mountain. And so, even before he was crucified, he told them.
- [2 : 1 9] And then in chapter 28, after he'd risen, he told some people as well. And so, verse 17, that's where they go. And when they saw him, they worshipped him. That is, they bowed down to him.
- For his resurrection had proven he is no ordinary person. But he is God's chosen king, Messiah or Christ, the Lord. But, verse 17, we're also told, some doubted.
- Now, I remember first reading this and wondering, why does Matthew include some doubted? Doesn't he want people to believe in Jesus and not doubt?
- But this actually does help people believe in Jesus and not doubt. Because if Matthew was making this up, he would not have included that phrase.
- Especially in his culture. I mean, even in our culture, right? If you're trying to sell something, you make it look good, don't you? If you're selling a car, you clean it and wash it, perhaps for the first time in its life.

[3 : 20] Or if you're selling a house, you clean and declutter. You're even told to get in some fake furniture. And the photos they take always make the place look bigger, right?

And so, if Matthew was making this up simply to sell Jesus, he would have made the story about Jesus look even better. And remove that phrase that some doubted.

But he adds this comment about some doubting because that's what happened. In other words, it shows us what we're reading really is true. Which means we're not wasting our time gathering here this morning or every Sunday morning for that matter.

Jesus really did rise to prove he really is Lord and so it really is worth believing in him. And even more than that, listening to him. Like the commission he gives.

Point to verse 18. Now as many people have pointed out, these are very familiar verses.

[4 : 35] And the main command is in yellow there. It's just one main command. Make disciples of all nations. In those days, a disciple was a student of a teacher who learned from the teacher, was shaped by the teacher, became loyal to the teacher, and so followed the teacher wherever they went.

And so the command here is to make people like this. A people who learn from Christ, are shaped by Christ, are loyal to Christ, and so follow Christ wherever he leads.

In other words, a disciple is someone who is all in for Jesus. And before we look at making disciples, it's worth pausing to ask ourselves, are we this kind of disciple?

You know, one who will learn from, be shaped by, loyal to, and so follow Jesus no matter what happens to us this year. Will we live for Jesus and be all in for Jesus this year?

But how are we to make these kinds of disciples? Well, for starters, it's God who actually, or ultimately, makes disciples. It's only God who can change people's hearts, right?

[5 : 55] That's why we need to keep persisting in prayer. Our church-wide prayer night is coming up this Wednesday night, first Wednesday of every month. But he often works through us as we share the gospel.

That's why Jesus has given us this command in the first place. But notice Jesus doesn't say, share the gospel, does he? He says, make disciples. This might mean we try to persuade the same person over a period of time and in different ways to respond in faith, until we're throwing pearls at swine, as Jesus said, or we're to go to different people until they respond in faith.

In fact, we're to keep preaching the gospel until disciples of all nations come to faith. And so we're to make disciples by continuing to share this gospel.

But it also involves us going, baptizing, and teaching. The more literal translation is on your handouts or on the screen. And the go is an ing word, an ing word.

It has a technical name, but I only taught primary school back in the day, so I think it's a participle. So the three ing words, going, baptizing, and teaching, which, funnily enough, correspond to the three G words in our mission statement, to go, gather, and grow in Christ, which has been at the bottom of slides for years now.

[7 : 35] This is where I get the idea from. And so firstly, going. This includes going to the nations, since we're to make disciples of all nations. It's why we have link missionaries whom we support.

It's why we've sent some of our own community to go overseas to the nations. But it also means going to people in our nation, especially when so many of the other nations have come to us, haven't they?

I don't know if you know this, but more than 5 million people in Melbourne made up of more than 140 different nations. Did you realize that? It's quite a lot, isn't it?

And so going includes going to them, whether it's on university campuses like our AFES workers, or the Blackburn Marcus like some of our St. John's members, or ESL as some of our Holy Trinity and St. John's people, or chatting with them after work, or school, or uni, or through sport, or over the fence.

Seeking to share Jesus with them, or inviting them to hear the good news about Jesus. The point is, with the nations all around us, never has it been so easy to go.

[8 : 48] It's the next bit that is often harder. Baptizing. Because I think it's more than just splashing them with some water. I remember one time I was watering the garden after a hot day, and I accidentally splashed some water over the fence, and I heard this, Hey!

I quickly apologized to my neighbor, but then wondered, Did I just baptize my neighbor? After all, the word baptize means, or it can mean dip, splash, wash, or dunk.

It can have all those meanings. And so it can mean that, but I don't think that's what Jesus was getting at. Rather, I think he's primarily talking about converting.

In the New Testament, water baptism was simply a sign that symbolized conversion, where a person believes in Jesus, and so changes allegiance from following one God, to serving Jesus as Lord.

And when a person does that, they are washed clean of their sins, and come into relationship with God. For example, Acts 2, Peter declares the gospel, and when the people ask how they should respond, he says in Acts 2, Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ, for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.

[10 : 10] Now, you'd actually expect Peter to say, Repent and believe, wouldn't you? Because the rest of the Bible does make it pretty clear that it's by believing in Jesus that he brings us forgiveness and the Spirit who dwells in us such that we come into relationship with God.

But he doesn't. He says, Repent and be baptized. Why? Is it because he thinks we don't have to believe? Of course not. Rather, it's because water baptism symbolized conversion, where a person does believe in Jesus and changes allegiance.

And that's the human side. And from God's side, he gives us forgiveness of sins and his Spirit who brings us into relationship with him. This also, by the way, makes sense of the word into in our passage.

It's literally baptizing them into the name, Father, Son, and Spirit. Water baptism is literally into water. But converting is into a relationship with God as Father, Son, and Spirit.

It's being gathered into his family, to use the second G of our mission statement. Of course, water baptism was also a normal part of that conversion process, which is why it became the symbol for it.

[11 : 28] It's why in the New Testament, people were often baptized the moment they believed, including a few verses later in Acts, when those who accepted or believed his message were baptized.

But in our passage today, I think the primary meaning of baptizing them is not the sign of water baptism. That's not the priority. It's what it symbolized, seeking to convert them, baptizing them into relationship with God as they hear the gospel and believe.

That's why Paul in 1 Corinthians 1, verse 17, says Christ did not send me to baptize. Well, hang on, great commission. No, no, Paul says he did not send me to baptize, but to preach Christ crucified.

Because again, the primary thing is calling people to repent, persuading them to believe in Jesus. In other words, seeking to convert them.

And when they do, then we're to teach them the third ing word of our commission and to help them grow as disciples, which is the third G word of our mission.

[12 : 41] And again, not just teaching them what Jesus said, but teaching them to obey. Notice. See, part of making disciples means encouraging each other, not just with the words of Jesus, but to obey Jesus, including the command to love one another, which means as we encourage each other to obey, we need to do it lovingly, gently and graciously, not harshly.

And appropriately, I think, in the right context, with the right kind of relationship with them. But it also includes teaching them this command to make disciples.

You know, everything I've taught you, he says, including this command to make disciples, so that every generation is to do this, including us here today. But why?

Why are we to do all this? Is it because we love them as our family and friends and want to see them safe for their good? Is it because we're told to in this passage today?

Is it because we're to have a heart like God's who's concerned to see all the lost saved? Or all the above? But the big reason here is the connection between verse 18 and 19.

[13 : 59] In verse 18, Jesus says, all authority has been given to him. He is Lord of all. Therefore, verse 19, we are to make disciples of all, that they might honour him as Lord.

But that is who he is. I don't know if you watched the women's tennis final last night, but spoiler alert, 26-year-old Elena Rebuckina, I think that's how the combinatorics were pronouncing it, it looks very different to the spelling, but she was the winner and she received applause, a massive trophy, which she's only just managing to hold there, and a cheque for \$4.15 million.

Not bad, hey? But rightly so. Well, she was the queen of world women's tennis, at least for last night. And so she was honoured as such.

Well, Jesus is king of the universe, and not for one night, but for eternity. And so it's right that he is honoured as such, followed as such, served as such.

The point is we're to make disciples not just for people's good, but also for Christ's honour. That more might treat him as Lord, for that is who he is.

[15 : 20] Because at the moment, there's not many doing that, are they? I mean, the population here in Doncaster, based on 2021 census and projections for this year, is estimated at 28,000 people.

The projected population of Blackburn is over 15,000 people. And so together, that's over 43,000 people in our church areas. But we don't have 43,000 people living all in as disciples of Christ, do we?

So even in our suburbs, there's more disciples to make, aren't there? But if we try for just 5%, that's 2,150 new disciples.

I mean, that's a lot, right? So let's go for 1%, that's 430 new disciples. Still sounds like a lot, doesn't it? I mean, by God's grace, last year we saw 40 people, I think it was over 40 people, become Christians.

Praise God. But 430? It all sounds rather daunting, doesn't it? Not to mention the fact that there will be ongoing opposition. And yet Jesus knows all this, which is why he ends with some reassurance.

[16 : 34] So more briefly, point 3, verse 20, he ends by saying, surely I am with you always to the very end of the age. Now this is not a polite platitude.

This is real reassurance. After all, who is the one who is with us? Isn't he the one that has all authority in heaven and on earth?

And so when he says, I will build my church and not even the gates of Hades will prevail, he has the power to pull it off. And so our efforts won't be wasted.

He has the authority and power to ensure our efforts will be used according to his purposes, in his timing. Whether it's 40 or 430.

The question for each of us is simply, will we do all we can to make more disciples of Christ this year? That more of Melbourne and beyond might honour Jesus as Lord.

[17 : 37] In other words, will we seek to honour Christ this year, not just by serving him ourselves, but by being part of our renewed effort to share the gospel as a church and as individuals?

That more of Melbourne might live all in for him? This will look different for each of us depending on our circumstances, which often change year to year and even during the year.

We may not be able to do a lot of this. We may be able to do just a little and not lots. But whether it's lots or little, whether it's big ways or small ways, we can all still pray.

We can all give even if it's a little and we can all speak as we have opportunity. So that together the gospel can continue to be proclaimed and disciples made.

And so the question remains the same on the screen. Will we do all we can to help make disciples this year? A couple of months ago I was at the installation service of our new archbishop who was actually passionate to see the good news of Jesus proclaimed in our city.

[18 : 45] And during his sermon a spontaneous applause broke out when he said this. Take a look and listen. And so let me state it plainly.

I will proclaim the good news of Jesus Christ crucified and risen as long as God gives me breath. Because of the cross our sins are forgiven.

Because of the resurrection new life is possible today. Because he will return we have hope for the future. Now at one level that's what an archbishop is supposed to say.

But the applause broke out because it hadn't been said for so long. And so as an Anglican church what better time is there for us to renew our efforts and work together to proclaim the gospel of Christ that more of Melbourne and beyond might honour him as Lord.

For that is who he is. Let's pray. Let's pray. Our gracious Father we thank you for the death and resurrection of Jesus.

[20 : 02] We thank you that by his death our sins are forgiven and that by his resurrection he is proclaimed to be Lord. And so please help us and use us we pray whether in little ways or big ways to work together and proclaim this good news this year that you would be pleased to work through us to make more disciples for Christ that more of Melbourne and beyond might honour him as Lord.

We ask it in Jesus' name. Thank you.