

Onward

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[0 : 00] Now the 11 disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them. And when they saw him, they worshiped him, but some doubted. That doubt really has the, that's probably not the best word really.

It's not the sense of they didn't believe, it's the sense of amazement. They had just, some of them had just seen him crucified. They knew he was dead. And now standing in front of them is the risen Lord.

And they're just kind of like too good to be true. Like can't believe this is happening. That's the sense of what they feel. And Jesus came and said to them, all authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.

Go therefore and make disciples of all nations. Baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you.

And behold, I am with you always to the end of the age. Well, before we can really understand our mission as a church, we have to reckon with what a church actually is.

[1 : 06] What is it? What does it actually mean to be a church? In one sense, the church consists of God's people from all places, all throughout history.

There is the bride of Christ. It is one bride. And it consists of all of God's people throughout all of history. It's an amazing thought, right? It's an amazing thought to think that you not only belong to Lakeside Bible Church, you belong to the bride of Christ, the church of Christ.

It's amazing for us to think about that. But then we have to consider local churches. What is actually a local church? I like how Jonathan Lehman illustrates it.

He says that they're really like little embassies of God's kingdom in a particular place at a specific time.

An embassy of the kingdom of God. Part of a church's responsibility because of that is to represent its king to the rest of the world. That's what an embassy does.

[2 : 14] It represents the culture and the ideas and the purposes of the king, even though they belong temporarily to a different land and to a different country.

That's a helpful way to think of what a local church is. That's what we are. We're a little embassy. It's not very big. It doesn't have to be. A little embassy of the kingdom of God in Lake Norman, in Cornelius.

Now, to get a grip on the kingdom identity, you have to understand God's desire to reveal himself to the created world. And I want you to think about that now. How has God revealed himself?

Well, primarily he's revealed himself through the word. We see that Sunday by Sunday through the scriptures. We are encouraged by that. But I want you to think beyond the written word. I want you to think about human representation of God.

We go all the way to the beginning. Genesis chapter 1. And we find that God made Adam and Eve in his own image. He created them to image him.

[3 : 20] To be his representative to the rest of the created world. God desired that Adam would reflect him to everything else.

His representative. A little embassy in the Garden of Eden for the kingdom. And then as the created world descended into sinful chaos and forgot God, we fast forward in the scriptures a little ways and we find God calls out this man named Abraham.

And he gives this covenant, this magnificent covenant to Abraham that he was going to establish a nation. That nation becomes the children of Israel. And they are God's representative people in the world.

If you wanted to know the true God and what he was like and what he desired, you had to look at Israel for a time. You had to look to their scriptures and to the law to really begin to understand. They were his representatives. But then Paul tells us in Galatians 4, When the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his son, born of a woman, born under the law that is the law of Israel in that old covenant, to redeem those who were under the law so that we might receive adoptions as sons. [4 : 37] So there's a new kingdom people, new kingdom representatives happening there. Adoption is what's happening there. In the incarnation of Jesus, we find the representative par excellence, the supreme representative.

God himself becomes flesh so that we might know him truly in his sinless life, in his substitutionary death, and in his victorious resurrection.

And we think of passages like Hebrews 1. In these last days, God has spoken to us by his son. That's important to this representative idea.

How did God speak in the garden? Through Adam. How did God speak in the Old Testament? Through Israel. How does God speak now? Through his son. And then the writer goes on to say, He is the radiance of the glory of God.

The exact imprint of his nature. Colossians 1. He is the image of the invisible God. For in him, all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell.

[5 : 48] And through him, to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross. God's representative. The man, Jesus Christ.

So then we understand now, as we look to the scriptures, if you want to know God, look at Jesus. Follow Jesus. Listen to Jesus.

So Jesus comes as God's true and better representative on earth. But there's a problem, isn't there? He's not here now. He left.

He was here for about 33 years. He provided salvation through his death and resurrection. And then he ascended back to the throne in Acts chapter 1. And he sits highly exalted at the right hand of the Father, awaiting a return.

But he's not here now. But he does this amazing thing where he tells the disciples in John 16 or 17. Maybe it's in both chapters where he talks about it. And he says, It's good for you that I'm leaving.

[6 : 50] And they had to have been thinking, How is that good? He said, It's good for you that I'm leaving. Because I'm going to send the comforter. I'm going to send the Spirit. And what is it that the Holy Spirit does?

The Holy Spirit uses the preaching of the gospel through the word of God to regenerate sinners. What does that mean? That there is a new representative people on earth now.

They're not bound by geographical boundaries. They don't consist of a physical nation called Israel anymore. It is the church of Christ.

We are his representatives here on this earth. In other words, if you belong to the church through faith in Christ, you are a representative agent of God who should be working in and through a local church that is a faithful embassy of the kingdom.

You are made to image him. And now in the gospel, you are made to be a witness for him. Peter tells us this.

[8 : 00] You are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.

Do you hear those words? Are they on the screen? Just leave it up there for a moment, Carson. Do you see those words? You're chosen. You are called. You are a priesthood.

You're a holy nation, a people for his own possession. Why? Why? So that you may proclaim the excellencies of him.

To who? To everyone. We are as his people, as a local embassy of the kingdom. We are his people, his representatives.

And there are many ways that we proclaim those excellencies. We do it through worship and prayer and all kinds of ways. But I want to focus our attention for just a few moments more on this straightforward command to make disciples of all nations.

[9 : 09] Because of who we are in Christ, we have a very specific mission to fulfill. And the great commission lays it out there very plainly for us, doesn't it? Just three quick things that I want to mention.

The first thing I want to point out is a direct mandate. A direct mandate. Matthew 28, verse 18. And Jesus came and said to them, All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.

So go. It's important. In fact, it's easy to kind of skip over this if you've been a Christian for a while. But you shouldn't easily dismiss this statement from the Lord.

The magnitude of what he says here is actually why the Jews, both in his day and today, continue to reject him. It's because of statements like this. It's because of what's at the heart of this claim that C.S. Lewis once wrote that it's impossible to be indifferent to the person of Christ.

That because of things like this, you must either admit that he is a liar or he is a lunatic, a crazy man, or he is actually indeed the Lord, the Lord of all.

[10:18] This is important. What is it that Jesus means when he says all authority has been given to him? He means that he possesses the authority and power that the scriptures say only belong to God.

This is a claim of divinity from the Lord Jesus. All authority over all things in heaven and earth has been given to me.

And Paul wrote to the Philippians and he said that this super exalted position of the Lord Jesus was given to him because of his work of salvation. Philippians chapter two, though he was in the form of God, he did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but he emptied himself, 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, Paul writes, God has highly exalted him, bestowed on him the name that is above every name so that 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.

Jesus is Lord of all. That includes his church. That means we're not only representatives of God, we are witnesses of the Lord Jesus.

[11:52] And as a result of his authority, he has given us a direct mandate to go with his gospel message. Notice what he says.

All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me, so go. The command to go is contingent upon his authority in verse 18.

So we need to think about that. What does that mean for us? Just two quick statements that may help you think this through. The first thing that this means as we think about Christ's authority is you can go.

You can go. What gives us the right to challenge someone else's beliefs or insist that sinners are headed for the eternal wrath of God?

What gives us the right to do that? Are people not on to something when they respond to our evangelism with something like, who are you to tell me how to live my life?

[13:02] Or what gives you the right to insist that your faith is correct and mine is incorrect? I actually think those are great questions because they need to be answered.

And the answer is vital. And you need to hear this. We do not preach the gospel to people on our own authority. We do not have the right to preach the gospel to people simply because we live in a nation that claims to support freedom of speech.

That's not why we do that. That's not what gives us the authority and the right to do it. Ours is not an inherent authority. It's the Lord Jesus Christ, the one with all authority in heaven and on earth, who then authorizes his people to go into the world and preach the gospel of his kingdom.

Someone says, what gives you the right to do this? And they say, well, it's not really a right. I've been authorized by the King of kings and the Lord of lords. This is what he's chosen me to do.

This is what he's made me to do. You can go. You have authority to go. And Christ's authority also means that we can be confident that obedience to him will result in fruitfulness.

[14:25] It's amazing, isn't it? There's a sense in which this is coming right after Jesus' resurrection. There's a sense in which he's telling his disciples, I was dead. Now I'm alive again.

I have authority over life and death. I have authority over condemnation and peace with God. So go with that message.

Tell people on my authority that I have authority to forgive their sins and give them life. It's amazing. And the second statement is simple. You can go, but you must go.

That's the other thing. You must go. We can't forget that the Great Commission is not an option for us. It's not something that we can elect to do. It is something that we are called to do.

It's a mandate. And we must not let fear and complacency keep us from being obedient to it. So we have a direct mandate. Number two, we have a distinct mission.

[15:27] A distinct mission. Verse 19, Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you.

Now this is where we get to the very heart of the church's mission. And again, there are many ways that we proclaim the excellencies of God. Corporate worship, personal holiness, social engagement.

Those are just some of the ways that we represent God in the world. But none of those things take away from the distinct mission that the Lord Jesus has given us.

And that mission is clear. Make disciples of all nations. That's the mission. It's distinct. You say, what is a church supposed to do?

Well, it's great if a church is engaged in its community, but that's not the distinct mission. The distinct mission is not social reforms. The distinct mission is not political alignments.

[16:29] The distinct mission is not fill in the blank, whatever it is that you want to fill it with. There's a distinct mission, and it is to make disciples of all nations.

So let's think about what a disciple is. A disciple is someone who follows Jesus. Now, I don't mean someone who identifies with Christianity on a superficial or cultural level.

That's not what we mean by that. That's not a disciple of Christ. That's not even a Christian. We're talking about someone who has been born again by the Holy Spirit, has trusted in Christ alone for eternal salvation, and is following him as Lord of their life.

That's what a disciple is. They follow Jesus. Now, to make disciples is very simple. To help other people follow Jesus.

Making disciples is not recruiting people to your church. Making disciples is not convincing others to adopt a Christian set of ethics or values or moral positions.

[17:44] That's not what it means to make disciples. To make disciples is to help someone else follow Jesus. And there's two ways that Jesus tells us to do that in this text.

The main verb here is to make disciples. That's the distinct mission. And then he gives us two ways that we are to do that. The first way is personal evangelism. This is what we talked so much about last night.

Personal evangelism. He says, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Which simply means to preach the gospel. It doesn't mean that physical baptism is what makes someone a Christian.

It's not. You can get dunked every Sunday of your life and it won't matter. There's nothing about that that makes you a Christian. It identifies you with a gospel message that does have the power to make you a Christian.

But the baptism itself is not the thing. But you can't baptize somebody who hasn't been born again and turned to Christ. And someone can't turn to Christ and obey him unless someone takes the word of God and preaches the gospel to them.

[18:52] Therefore, the first step of making disciples must be personal evangelism. Personally sharing the message of salvation and praying for God to save those who hear it.

Now that's an intimidating task, isn't it? We all have to admit that. Unless you're just like one of the super extroverted people or one of those people that just doesn't mind to just say whatever's on your mind at any given time, no matter what comes back at you.

Maybe some of you are that way. I pretend to be that way, but I'm not typically that way in the heart.

It's an intimidating task, isn't it? To go to somebody and say, you're a sinner and God's going to send you to an eternal hell unless you turn to Christ.

He's your only hope. It's simple, but it's hard. It's hard to do. You say, how can I actually do that?

Well, you need to be prepared to do it. You say, well, I really don't know.

I don't have any training. Well, if you know enough of the gospel to be a Christian, then you know enough of the gospel to help someone else become a Christian. You don't have to be specially trained. You don't have to have a particular giftedness.

[20:04] You just have to give the truth. Maybe a helpful paradigm would be this. Maybe you'd start with a question like this. Why is there something rather than nothing?

Like just in existence. Why are we here? Why do we exist? Why is there something rather than nothing? You see, in our culture now, Julie and I learned so much about this this week in this seminar with Al Mohler, and he talked a lot about these things.

But you see, in the neo-paganism of our world, the atheism that exists today cannot exist without Darwinism. Without Darwinism, there is no atheism.

And there wasn't prior, not in the way that we know it today. And the question for them is this. Why is anything here? Why does any of this exist? Darwinism does not have an answer for that.

Not a satisfying answer, at least. The Bible has the answer for that. Genesis 1-1. In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.

[21 : 07] And if God created the heavens and the earth, that means that he created you. And if he created you, that means he owns you, which is where the rub is. That's what we don't want to admit, right?

Because if we acknowledge that there's a creator, then we have to acknowledge that there is a purpose, that we have to be accountable to him, right? So why is there something rather than nothing? Well, there's something because there is a God who has made this something.

And he has made this something, including you, for a very specific purpose. Which leads us to a second question. Where did it all go wrong? If God is good, and he was good in creation, why are we in such a mess now?

Where did it all go wrong? Well, we go to passages like Romans 3. All have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. We think about passages like Romans 5.

Sin comes by one man, that is Adam, and death by sin. Therefore, death passes upon all men because all have sinned, Paul writes. The issue, what's gone wrong, is our own rebellion against the creator.

[22 : 14] And then the next question is, well, is there any hope for that? Is there any hope? Well, yes, there is, actually. And it's not found in your best efforts, and it's not found in your religious involvement.

The only hope that we have is in the gospel of Jesus. That God showed his love toward us, and that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Or how about Ephesians chapter 2?

God, who is rich in mercy. When we were dead in our trespasses and sins. Not dying. Dead. God quickened us. God quickened us.

Made us alive together with Christ. By grace you have been saved. The only hope this world has is the gospel of Jesus. Which leads us to a final question.

Where is all of this going? Where is all of it going? For that, we go to the very final pages of the Bible. Revelation 19 and 20 and 21 and 22.

[23 : 11] And we see this picture, like we talked about last night, of the great white throne judgment. All of this is heading towards final judgment. Christ will set everything right.

Sinners will be judged. Christians will enjoy eternal life. Those who continue to reject Christ will be cast into the lake of fire.

That's where it's all going. Now, it's really easy for me to stand up here on a Sunday morning and go through that. And of course, conversations have different nuances. But it's got to have something in there. That's the gospel, right?

You have to understand creation. You have to understand sin. You have to understand salvation in Christ and his grace. Listen, what is coming ahead and his renewing power?

Personal evangelism. Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved, Paul says. How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? How are they to believe in him in whom they've never heard?

[24 : 11] How are they to hear without someone preaching? How are they to preach unless they're sent by a church to do it? So faith comes by hearing and hearing by the word of God.

Okay, so you've got the picture. We've talked about that a lot the last two days, personal evangelism. But there's a second part to this that Jesus says. Not only are we to make disciples of all nations first by evangelizing them, but then he says we are to be involved in mutual discipling is what I like to call it.

Mutual discipling. He says evangelism is essential, but it's not all. It continues. Teaching them to observe everything I have commanded you, Jesus says.

The disciples were to share the gospel message and train others to believe everything else that Jesus had commanded them to believe and do. And we must acknowledge that this work will not be finished until Jesus returns.

Al Mohler said this this week, and I found it so helpful and really frustrating on one hand, but then really helpful on the other end. And it was this, I can't bring you to completion. I want to.

[25 : 23] I wish I could do that. I wish that the labors, the pastoral labor that God has given me to enjoy and to endure, I wish that it was actually capable of making you everything that you're supposed to be.

But I can't actually do that. And you can't do that. Only Jesus can do that. And Jesus will do that in the end. But in the meantime, we're helping one another along that way, and he's using us to do that until he brings it to completion.

And the work will never be finished, which means one of two things for us. First, it means there will never be a time when you no longer need to help other people faithfully follow Jesus.

There will never be a time when you can just kind of hang up your church member gloves or whatever and say, you know what, I've put in my time. I'm just ready to show up Sunday and enjoy the service and listen to the singing and do the things.

There will never be a time when that's possible for you. There will always be someone to help follow Jesus more faithfully. It also means there will never be a time in your life when you don't need others to help you faithfully follow Jesus.

[26 : 38] We need one another. It doesn't matter how long you've been a Christian or how well you know your Bible. Sometimes you need someone maybe that doesn't even know the Bible quite as well as you to remind you of the things that you easily forget.

We need one another. It's one of the reasons why it's so important to emphasize meaningful membership in a local church.

If the extent of your relationships in this church are limited to who you might see and speak to on a Sunday morning, then it's likely that there is a significant spiritual deficiency in your life.

Not only are you falling short of Jesus' disciple-making program, as he explains here, you're actually robbing yourself of a gracious blessing from God. Believe it or not, you are God's gracious gift to this church.

You are. And the people sitting around you need you. And you may not understand exactly why or exactly how you can benefit them, but that's not for you to understand.

[27 : 49] That's for God's purposes. He will use you. You just need to engage. You just need to care. You need to have coffee. You need to have lunch. You need to have people in your home.

Hospitality is a mark of Christian living. We need to be more hospitable people with one another. We need to do our best to actually have a conversation that's meaningful, that goes beyond how bad the Panthers are.

Because they're bad. Men, we need other guys in our life that will sit around and will ask us some hard questions. Someone who will ask us, what actually have you been looking at this week?

How have you been treating your wife this week? Ladies, you need the same thing. We need one another. This is why a discipling culture is one of those focuses, those core values that we talk about so much.

And we need to ask two questions before we wrap things up. First, who are you discipling? Who is it in your life? Let me even qualify that as outside of your family.

[28 : 56] Because the assumption is that we're all doing that with our families. And if you're not, that's where you need to start. But outside of your family, who is it in your life? And who is it specifically in this church that you are intentionally helping to more faithfully follow Jesus?

Like you just know, like this person or these guys or these ladies or whoever it is, these are the people that right now in this season, I'm doing my best to pour my life into and to help them.

That's the first question. And if nobody comes to mind, find somebody. Find somebody. Marty could use a lot of discipling. Go to Marty after the service this morning and say, Marty, I'd love to disciple you.

Marty could disciple most of us. The second question is this. Who's discipling you right now? So who are you discipling? But who's discipling you?

You see, you can't forget that. There's never a moment that you've arrived, not until you get to heaven. And we need one another. And some of us, we just need to go to somebody else in the

church and say, look, I don't know exactly what all this means and how it needs to work out.

[29 : 58] But would you just consider, maybe for the next three or four months, meeting with me regularly, just to help me be a more faithful Christian? I know you all well, and I don't think there's a person in this room that would look at you and say, you know what, I don't think I'm interested.

And if they are, come see me, because I'll do it. I'll do it. We need it. Personal evangelism. Mutual discipling.

Let's wrap all of it up. I know it's been long. Third thing here in the text, and this is so good. Divine means. Divine means. Verse 28.

Behold, Jesus says, I am with you always. To the end of the age. I am with you always. Last night we talked about this.

Jesus is the reaper, right? Now he uses us, and we have these smaller moments of where we get to enjoy reaping and fruitfulness, but Jesus is the one who actually does the reaping.

[31 : 04] He's the only one that can save. We can't save people. All we can do is take the gospel message. Jesus does the reaping. And this is what's amazing about it. Think back to that story in John chapter 4, the woman at the well.

Remember, do you remember why she was coming to the well in the middle of the day? All signs point to her being a social outcast, even among her own people. Which means she's not the kind of person anybody else is going to listen to.

But then do you see what happens in the chapter? She leaves Jesus, and she goes into the town, and it doesn't take very long. And then what's the next thing that happens? Suddenly, all the people in the town are coming out to see Jesus.

And why is it that they're coming out to see Jesus? Because the woman that they don't even like told them to. Now, why would they do that? That doesn't make any sense at all.

Why would they just suddenly start listening to this woman from the well? Let me tell you why.

Because Jesus is the reaper. And when he tells the disciples, as you go in missional faithfulness, I'm going to go with you in divine authority, and I'm going to provide the divine means.

[32 : 14] You see, here's what I think Jesus was doing. Through the Holy Spirit, he's already working on the people's hearts in that town, so that it didn't matter who that woman was. As soon as she said, come see this man, there's something in them that says, you need to see this man.

Now, some of us, we get really discouraged about that. And we think, I don't have a lot of gifting, and I'm really kind of nervous to talk to people. And man, if I go to talk to this person, they actually know me.

Which means that they know my sin, and they know my past, and they're never going to listen to me about that. Listen, if they'll listen to that woman at the well, why do you think Jesus won't cause the people in your life to listen to you?

You see, it's not ultimately about you. And it's not about me. He is the reaper. He is doing this work. Listen to what Paul said to the Corinthians.

When I came to you, brothers, I did not come proclaiming to you the testimony of God with lofty speech or wisdom. For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus and him crucified.

[33 : 17] And I was with you in weakness, in fear, and much trembling. And my speech and my message were not in plausible words of wisdom, but in the demonstration of spirit and power.

So that your faith may not rest in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God. You see, the people that Jesus loves to use are the people that at the end of it will immediately say, that had nothing to do with me because I'm not real good at talking and I don't really know everything to say, but the Lord is just faithful and he does his work through us.

Isn't that what Paul's saying there? Isn't that what Jesus was doing with the woman at the well? And here's the other thing. You may not always see the fruitfulness, but Jesus is always going with you.

Last night after the service, a teenager from Laurel, that I don't even personally know.

He wasn't at the church when Julie and I were there. He came up to me after the service and he said, I want to convey a message to you from a friend of mine that he had invited to come to that teen activity back in August.

Do you remember that? We had it here in the gym at the end of August and Laurel's teens came over. Well, this guy invited his buddy who doesn't go to the church there, invited his buddy to come along. Now, I didn't preach a gospel message that day.

