The Church and Its Mission

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[0:00] This is the very end of Matthew's Gospel. If you grab your Bibles and you have a look, you turn over the page, it's Mark, right? So we're at the very, very end. And it's actually the second to last week of a series we've been doing.

I guess it's penultimate, right? This is our penultimate sermon in a series called The Church Jesus Builds. And this sermon is called The Church and Its Mission. All right, see the passage? Grab it, grab it, look at it, slide your eyes over it, fantastic.
But don't you find something very interesting here? Straight away, something very, very interesting. So you've got the Great Commission, right? 16 to 20. Yes, fantastic. But isn't it interesting that there is this section just before the Great Commission, which is the guards in the priest section?
It's even got some dialogue. So this is the climax of the whole of Matthew's Gospel. He's arriving at this point where it's like the last hurrah, the big kind of big, you know, like flourishing, rhetorical flourishing kind of thing.
It's great. But just before that, it's like there's this interesting little vignette, this little story about priests and these guards. Why is it there?
[1:16] Because I want to talk about that first very quickly. Well, it's there for contrast. In the guards' story and in the Great Commission below it, what we have is two responses to Christ, two different ways to respond to Christ.

So let's walk very quickly through 1 to 15 and then we'll move on to the Great Commission. Okay. Sorry, 11 to 15. So 11 to 15. So at this point in the story, the women have gone to the tomb, the Marys, an angel has appeared, the guards freaked out.
The angel said to the woman at the tomb, tell the disciples to meet Jesus in Galilee. He's risen. It's a great result. And so they do. Then the very next thing, 11 to 15.
So the guards go to the chief priests and tell them what's going on. The priests chat amongst themselves. They agree that they should cover this up. And the priests say to the guards, listen, you can't tell people what happened.
For goodness sake, don't do that. That will be a disaster for this kind of thing we've got going on here. Right? So just don't tell anyone what's happened. Here's what you need to do. Tell people that you just fell asleep and that the disciples stole the body.
[2:34] Admitting, a guard admitting that he fell asleep on the job is a bit of a death sentence. It can be a death sentence because your major job is just being like conscious, you know, for this whatever, you know, day period or whatever.

You just got to be awake kind of seeing what's going on. So to admit that you couldn't even pull that off, that's a complete vocational disaster. And people, guards were killed for doing this kind of thing. So the priests pay them off. They say, we'll give you tons of money. Lie. Say you actually fell asleep and, you know, the disciples stole Jesus' body. And then the priests say, listen, I know you're concerned about sort of your lives.
And so, it says in verse 14, it goes, and if it comes to the governor's ears, if the governor finds out about this, don't worry, we'll just pay him off as well. Not a problem. This won't be a problem for you. Goodness me, there's a lot you could say about this here. Firstly, it's a continuation of the practices that put Christ actually on the cross, isn't it? It's corrupt leadership, bribing people.
[3:43] But I think, I think the big thing here, and the reason Matthew put it here, is because it shows one way that we respond to the truth of Jesus. And that is, hide, cover, and keep going.

Nothing to see here. Hide, cover, just keep going. The world goes on. Their views of money and power, never changing. And it's certainly an easy way to respond to God, isn't it?

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You know, you hide, and you kind of spend your, you spend your way out of having to deal with the truth of the gospel. And just get on with business as usual. And this is exactly what these folks are doing here.
And of course, the other way, is the way of the followers of Jesus. The way of truth, and obedience, and not hiding and lying. And we see this in verse 16 to 20.
So, we'll move on to there. Widely known as the Great Commission. By the way, this is going to be a short sermon this evening. I don't, I hope that's not a disappointment. I've already had a couple of great sermons, actually.
[4:49] Already in the service. How is that perfectly formed paragraph at the start of the service? Fantastic, Jordan. Advent. The candles. Yep. The Bible.

Okay, the Great Commission. Verse 16. You see there, it says now, 11 disciples went to Galilee. Why 11? This is because Judas, at this point, has betrayed Jesus and suicided.
But why Galilee? Why did they go to Galilee? Now, you're familiar with that name, Galilee, and you might think it's kind of like a destination. It's not. It's not like Cancun or something.
You know, like, let's meet in Cancun. It's going to be great. It's really set up well, the gatherings, you know. It's not. Galilee was regarded as a bit of a backward locale. It was big, but it was right at the far edge of the Jewish world.
And during the various wars, it sort of, it was variously in Jewish rule and, so to speak, or outside of Jewish rule, depending on who was kind of ruling at the time and how these different little wars went.
[5:58] In New Zealand, we'd call it the boonies. I don't know. Do you have that saying out here, the boonies? The boonies. The boonies. Interesting. When I wrote this, I thought, oh, this is the boonies. And I thought, where does the word come from, the boonies?

Just the factoid. Where does it come from again? Oh, boondocks. Have you heard the phrase, the boondocks?
Okay, so the boondocks is an Americanized version of a Filipino word, bundok, which means mountain region. Oh. You're so welcome.
So anyway, so in New Zealand, so Galilee, Galilee's like the boonies. It's like, it's just way out there. So why there? Why would Jesus say, folks, okay, let's meet in Galilee? It says, let's go meet in Galilee because it's the edge of the world, their world, it's where the Gentiles were as well.
So remember, up until this point, Jesus is focused on his mission, which was to the Jews, mostly, almost exclusively to the Jews. And so by saying, let's meet in Galilee, he's signaling something has changed.
[7:09] Something wonderful is going to happen. Something great is going to happen. There's a change in the mission. Moving on, verse 17, And when they saw him, they worshipped him, but some doubted.

So they met Jesus here, and some worshipped, and some doubted. I don't think the writer is setting up a contrast between good guys and bad guys here. It's not like, some worshipped, oh, they're so great, those guys.
Some doubted. Boo. Like, you should name them, shame them. They're the bad people. No, I don't think it's that. The word doubt there can also mean hesitation.
And you can't blame them. Like, how do you respond to a super being person that you thought was dead, but now is alive, turns out, runs the universe?
Like, what do you do? Like, do you know what I mean? How do you actually, what would you actually, you could be thinking, oh, I'd be so, I'd totally, I'd just, I'd own that. You know, but how do you respond to this person you thought was dead, turns out, is the king of the whole universe, right?
[8:17] So, we should have grace here. Lots of grace. I think worship and doubt tend to go together anyway. Well, they certainly do in my experience.

And just as a side note, if you do doubt, doubt in a real intellectual way, because it can mean both things, hesitation or like a, don't ignore that.
Don't try and push your doubt into the pit of your stomach and don't be embarrassed by it and push it down and pretend it's not there. Let it run its course. Tim Keller's got a fantastic little, short little pithy paragraph on this.
Tim Keller, the Presbyterian minister out of New York. Let me read this extended quote to you. He says, Faith, without doubts, is like a human body without antibodies in it. People who blithely go

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through life too busy or indifferent to ask hard questions about why they believe as they do will find themselves defenseless when either the experience of tragedy or the probing questions of a smart skeptic.
A person's faith can collapse almost overnight if she has failed over the years to listen to her own doubts, which should only be discarded after long reflection. Believers should acknowledge and wrestle with doubts not only their own but their friends and neighbors.
[9:37] So, in your relationship with Jesus, if you doubt, let those doubts do what they're supposed to do.

They're supposed to take you to a place of thoughtful reflection. Verse 18. So, some doubted, some worship, and then Jesus says something.
He says this amazing thing in verse 18. He goes, All authority in heaven and earth has been given to me. Boy, oh boy. This is very serious. All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Now, you might think, but didn't Jesus have authority before this moment? I mean, wasn't he God before this? Didn't he have some kind of, didn't he have some fairly significant influence before this, right? Of course, of course.
Jesus was. So, before the incarnation, which is when Jesus came as a baby into the world, grew into a man and was crucified, before that, Jesus was. He existed. He was part of the Godhead, Father, Son, Holy Spirit.
[10:38] He was divine and majestic and glorious. Of course. He was the son of the Father eternally. Then Jesus was born into the world. Was he still God then?

Of course. Yes. And he had authority. He had authority over sickness and death and evil and he had authority over creation. But it does say he only did what he saw his Father do.
And in the flesh, there were self-imposed limitations. And he ended up on a cross. So, in his incarnation, his power, what did it look like? It looked like weakness. So, Jesus was the son of the Father in weakness.
I mean, he got crucified for goodness sake. Like, that's weakness right there, of course. like a, yes, I'll stop there because I'll just, I'll start rambling.
Okay, Jesus resurrected. Jesus ascended. This is a new thing for, this is a new phase in Jesus' life.
[11:38] It's so awkward to talk about Jesus like this, but something has changed. It's not the same as the pre-incarnation.

It's not the same as the incarnation. God the Father, has given Jesus all authority, and it repeats that word all. You see that if you look carefully. All authority, not just over the world, but the heavens, everything.
The universe is under new management. God has given Jesus responsibility, rulership over everything, and it all happened at the resurrection.
Let me read Romans 1 to you. There are a ton of verses we could go through to explain this. I'll just read this one from Romans 1. 1 to 5. Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God, which he promised beforehand through his prophets and the holy scriptures, concerning his son, who was descended from David according to the flesh, and was declared to be the son of God in power according to the spirit of holiness by his resurrection from the dead, Jesus Christ our Lord.
Through him, we have received grace and apostleship to bring about the obedience of faith for the sake of his name among all nations. So from being the son of the father in weakness in his incarnation, self-limiting himself, he is now the son of the father in power, given the universe to rule over.
[13:04] And now verse 19 comes as a shock after that. By the way, all that stuff I've just talked about, as you're explaining in that, at this end, heresy. At this end, heresy.

All right? Somewhere in the middle, it's all quite good. And that was where I was aiming for. I can talk to you more about that afterwards if you like. But verse 19 is a shock because he says, go therefore and make disciples of all nations, which is an interesting thing to say after you've just said, God the father has made me the ruler over the entire universe.
Do you remember when Frodo offers Galadriel the ring? She offers her ultimate power. And here's what she says in the movie. She says, you know in the movie where it all gets polarized and her eyes get dark and you know, it's great, right?

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She says, instead of a dark lord, you would have a queen, beautiful and terrible as the dawn, treacherous as the sea, stronger than the foundations of the earth. All shall love me and despair. It's a great scene. It's interesting. It's all about what it means for her. I've got this power all about what it means for her, right? Jesus could have talked about what this means for him. He could have filled it out a bit for us.
[14:19] But instead of doing that, instead of expanding on this crazy thing he's just said, this amazing thing he's just said, the shock is that instead of doing that, he talks about the implications for the church.

He says, God has given me all authority on heaven and earth. Here's what it means for you. Straight away. Here's what it means for us. And he says, so what does he say?
He says, the implications are this. He says, go make disciples. Make them in all the nations. And in doing this he's fulfilling the promise to Abraham back in Genesis. I will make you a father of nations. So go out there, do it, he says. Make it happen. And then he qualifies it. He goes, disciples though, right? He's going, we want disciples. Not just converts.
We want followers committed to a teacher. Which is why it says baptize and teach them in verses 19 and 20. So it's not just converts. It's not, it's not people who, who are, not just people who make a start in their faith and it just kind of doesn't really go anywhere.
[15:31] And it's not just people who are, have an intellectual interest in Christianity. You know, there are tons of those people around. They're a very sad group of people I find. A disciple is someone who has had a radical change of heart demonstrated through baptism, a complete change of allegiance, and are committed to the work of growing in their faith.

This is what Jesus says. Go make those, those folks. Which is why you should baptize and teach. I heard a guy recently talk about seeing his wife discipled so well at Woman at 10.
Woman at 10 is the meet of Thursday at 10 o'clock. And it's a discipleship group for women. And it's brilliant. And he said, you know, I just wasn't getting this.
I wasn't getting discipled. I was kind of stalled. And so he joined the new men's discipleship group because he was kind of like, my wife is, is being discipled and what am I doing? I need this.
You can talk to Jordan about that. They can talk to you about that, yeah, about the men's discipleship group. Let me say one more thing before moving on. When we think about disciple making, I wonder if you primarily put yourselves at the end of the disciple making process automatically.
[16:48] You think, disciple making, yes, I want to be discipled, which is, you should think, it's wonderful. You should think, I want to be discipled. But we should be at the giving end as well.

So are you involved in the work of disciple making? Given the gifts that God has given you, what would that look like for you?
It's a great thing to pray into, great thing to think about. Summary so far, and then finishing up. Because of the resurrection, Jesus is now at the right hand of God.
He's in charge of all creation. He has all authority. And what does he do? He delegates the mission. He delegates the mission.
He doesn't just snap his fingers and make everyone believers. He delegates the mission to the church. In his wisdom, he says, now, here's how I'm going to spread my authority through the work of the church.
[17:55] That's basically what's happened so far. And then right at the end, he says something wonderful. This whole idea of going into the world and making disciples, being a discipler in whatever context it has given you, would be madness, right?

Complete folly. Just kind of weird and stupid and silly thing to do. If it wasn't for these final words in Matthew. Behold, I am with you always to the end of the age.
Perhaps one of the most encouraging sentences in the Bible. And it takes us right to the start of the gospel again. In Matthew 1.20 ends out wonderfully appropriate for Christmas.
Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son and they shall call his name Emmanuel, which means, which means what? It means God with us.
So this whole gospel is bookended with this idea. This whole gospel is enveloped with this incredible thought that Jesus is with us, that Jesus is with you and always will be.
[19:11] And I hope that is a comfort to you as you journey in discipleship through failure and success and joy and sorrow and depression and darkness and light.

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That Jesus is with you and will always be with you. Amen.

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