

An Unfinished Task

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Preacher: Mark Prater

[0 : 00] The following message was given at a Sunday celebration at Trinity Grace Church in Athens.! For more information about Trinity Grace, please visit us at TrinityGraceAthens.com.

Well, this morning I have the joy and privilege of introducing our guest. His name is Mark Prater. He is a pastor at a local church, as you heard, in Glen Mills, Pennsylvania, at our dear friend church, Covenant Fellowship.

And not only that, he serves in another role as Executive Director of Sovereign Grace Churches, the family of churches we have the joy and privilege of serving within. So we are so grateful for him to be here.

Now, there's many things that we could say about Mark. And from my perspective, I've known Mark for a few years now, and I knew him even from a distance before we knit ourselves into this family of churches.

And I don't know if Mark knows this, but he was influential in my wife and I becoming a part of Sovereign Grace, and this church in particular, as we watched him lead an organization, and to do so with extreme gentleness, kindness, and courage.

[1 : 12] So from a distance, I got to see his courageous leadership of an organization. And then over time, we had the opportunity to interface with him personally.

And then I realized not only is he a courageous leader, but he is a man of great humility. It's what marks his leadership. So we were drawn to that and his personal care.

Even at the men's retreat this last weekend, several of the guys that have met him previously know exactly what I'm talking about. He walks up to you. He knows your name. He remembers prayer requests that he heard year two, three years ago.

And so this is an extraordinary man, not because of his own ability, but because he loves the Lord and depends on him with all humility. And so it's a joy for me to introduce our friend Mark Prater.

Would you welcome him now? Oh, thank you for your warm welcome. Taylor, thank you for your very kind words. They're really meaningful. I didn't know I had that influence and I'm glad it influenced you and your family to be a part of Sovereign Grace.

[2 : 15] You can open your Bibles to Matthew 28. After that introduction, just so you are not, let me just really tell you who I am. I got the lowest score in the archery competition yesterday.

Yep. I think it was a world record low. So, I think the guys that won, I forget, maybe Joe, what was your score? 24, 25, something like that?

24. Okay. The top score, 25. Joe gets 24, takes us all out. My score, do you want to take a guess? Seven. Seven.

Seven. So, just so you understand who I really am, I thought you might want to know that. I wanted to come at Walt's invitation, not only to participate in the men's retreat, but to be with you this morning, not only to support my friend Walt.

and he is a dear friend. We had this fun stand-up later than we should last night talking after being at a men's retreat where we retired, but it was a joy.

[3 : 17] But I wanted to come to thank you as a church for being a part of our small family of churches known as Sovereign Grace. And I just didn't want to send you a note or an email.

I wanted to come and look you in the eye and say thank you. Now, you are making us a stronger family of churches. And I want you to understand how.

First of all, your gospel presence here in Athens and East Tennessee and believe your gospel influence beyond that, it strengthens us.

Your commitment and desire to have the gospel preached from this pulpit, your desire to apply the gospel to your life, and your commitment to reach out to those who don't know Jesus with the good news of the gospel.

That strengthens us as a family of churches. I said this to the guys yesterday. Another way that you strengthen us, you have planted and built a strong gospel-centered church in a small-town community.

[4 : 26] And we want, as a family of churches, to plant other churches in small towns. In fact, we've got a new initiative in Sovereign Grace that Walt is a part of called the Small Towns Initiative because we want to find men who have a heart for communities like Athens, and we want to support them to plant churches there, gospel-centered churches.

And so, when we go to do that, there are unique issues in planting in small towns. So, I would say you talk to Walt, and you come and visit Trinity Grace, and you'll get an idea of how to do that.

So, you are a model to us, and that strengthens us as a family of churches. I don't know if you know this or not, but Walt serves Sovereign Grace more broadly on our theology committee, and that strengthens us as a family of churches.

And your prayers for him and encouragement to him in that capacity strengthens us. Your heart for the gospel really is for the nations as well. You've been involved in going to South Korea and supporting what Songwon has done here.

I think Songwon has been here. Is that right, Walt? You've gotten to know him, and he feels partnership when he's with you. It really makes us a family of churches. So, your gospel influence is not only in the states, it moves beyond the states as well.

[5 : 48] And then just after the last 24 hour, 36 hours, to be with your men has been such a joy. These are godly men.

I've tried to tell as many men as I've been able to, you've got good godly men in this church. Not perfect men, but good godly men. And they encourage me in my faith.

And we need good godly men today in a culture where manhood's turned upside down in many ways, right? Not here. So, thank you guys for being men who follow Christ and being men who want to apply the gospel not only to your life, but to your homes.

I thank God for you. That's another way. You strengthen us as a family of churches. So, thank you, thank you, thank you for being a part of Sovereign Grace. Maybe you're new here to Trinity Grace, and maybe you haven't heard much about our small family of churches known as Sovereign Grace.

I want to tell you why we exist. Here's why we exist. We exist as a family of churches to advance the gospel of Jesus Christ together by planting and strengthening churches throughout the world.

[7 : 01] And we want to do all of that for one great purpose. We want to do that for the glory of God alone. And there's a number of ways that we go about that. One of them is through church planting, local evangelism, local outreach, and mission, which happens to be one of our seven shared values that we have as a family of churches that shapes who we are as we build our churches together.

And we have a value that focuses on that, church planting, local outreach, and mission, because we believe that we don't only want to build our churches on the gospel.

We want to be people who declare, who share the gospel of Jesus Christ. And so, in each point of my sermon this morning, I'm going to give you some updates on how we are doing church planting and how we're reaching out to the lost and how we're doing global missions throughout the world, so that you can get an idea of how collectively we are doing that together as a family of churches.

The title of my sermon is An Unfinished Task. And we're going to read Matthew chapter 28, verses 16 through 20, what has become known, as you well know, as the Great Commission.

Verse 16. Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them. And when they saw Him, they worshipped Him.

[8 : 35] But some doubted. 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 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. May God bless the preaching of His Word.

On Sunday, February 21, 2016, over 5,000 churches in 100 different nations sang the same hymn entitled, Facing a Task Unfinished.

The hymn was believed to be sung by people with many different languages by an estimated 1.1 million Christians on that particular Sunday.

[9 : 39] The first verse of that hymn, it goes like this. Facing a task unfinished that drives us to our knees, a need that undiminished rebukes our slothful ease, we, who rejoice to know Thee, renew before Thy throne the solemn pledge, we owe Thee to go and make Thee known.

This hymn was recently updated by Keith and Kristen Getty, which was first written in 1929 by China Inland Mission worker and Pastor Frank Houghton.

And he wrote that hymn in 1929 as a call to send 200 missionaries into China at the height of that country's persecution of Christians.

And by the end of 1931, 200 missionaries at the risk of their very own lives, they went to China to finish this unfinished task of preaching the gospel to all tribes and tongues and nations.

And even though this hymn was written 94 years ago, the task to make disciples of all nations, it remains unfinished today. According to the Joshua Project, there are over 6,500 people groups, not 6,500 people groups, who are considered unreached with the gospel, which is about 42% of the world's population today.

[11 : 13] And if you think that the Great Commission work is only work that needs to be done outside of the United States, listen to this statistic. According to the Center for the Study of Global Christianity at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, that's in the Boston area, approximately 400,000 missionaries were sent throughout the world in 2010.

In that year, do you know which country received the most missionaries? What would you guess? It's the United States. In 2010, countries outside the United States sent 32,400 missionaries here to the states to bring the good news of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

That stat alone tells us that there are people that live all around us that continue to need to hear the good news of Jesus. And because we live in a world that's more globally connected than ever, the people that live around us may be from different tribes and tongues and nations.

So this call to make disciples of all nations, we can all participate in, whether we go to another nation or we simply reach out to the neighbors that live across the street.

See, the Great Commission is a reminder that you as a church and we as a family of churches, we have this unfinished task to make disciples of all nations, which is why we include church planting, outreach, and global missions as one of our seven shared values within our family of churches.

[12 : 50] Because we, along with you, are a family of churches that believe through local outreach and through our partnership together, plant churches throughout the world and do global missions.

We will participate in some small way in reaching every tribe and tongue and nation with the gospel. And we call this a shared value.

We share this value because there's so much more that we can do together as a family of churches than any one church can do alone in fulfilling the Great Commission.

So, three things that we learn from the Great Commission. First, we fulfill God's global mission for His glory. We fulfill God's global mission for His glory.

You see there in verse 18, Jesus says, all authority in heaven on earth has been given to me. So, it does raise the question, who gave Jesus this authority?

[13 : 47] According to several passages in our Bibles, we know that it is God the Father that gave God the Son this universal authority. One proof text, John chapter 12, verse 49.

This is Jesus speaking. For I have not spoken on my own authority, but the Father who sent me has Himself given me a commandment, what to say and what to speak.

So, God the Father, who has given Jesus universal authority, He is our Father as well because He is our Creator.

He is the one who created the heavens and the earth. We know that from the very first verse in our Bibles. Genesis 1-1 says that God, God created the heavens and the earth, and that's important because it gives Him exclusive reign and exclusive authority over the universe, including people from all nations.

And you know this, after God creates the heavens and the earth, He creates Adam and Eve, and He puts them in the Garden of Eden. It's a wonderful time in redemptive history.

[14 : 59] Before the fall, there was no need for mission, as there will be no need for mission in the new heavens and the new earth. But you know this, because of Adam's original sin, all of creation is now corrupted.

All of creation is fallen, including people from, all people, from every nation, who have, like us, rejected God's universal reign and authority and are now objects of His wrath.

It's like a universal soul health crisis that happens in Genesis chapter 3. Yeah, Genesis chapter 3. Yet in that same chapter, we get the very first glimpse of God taking initiative to save sinners from wrath.

You see that in Genesis 3-15. This is God who says to the serpent this, I will put enmity between you and the woman and between your offspring and her offspring.

He, speaking about Christ, He shall bruise your head and you shall bruise His heel. In other words, God announces that the offspring of Eve, which can be traced genealogically to the person of Jesus Christ, He will bruise the head of Satan where He defeats Him on the cross.

[16 : 31] In other words, in Genesis 3-15, we get the first glimpse of the gospel in all of Scripture. And from Genesis 3-15, we see God's gracious movement to save a desperately needy, fallen world who is in rebellion against Him and which stands under His righteous judgment.

From Genesis 3-15 forward, it's God's initiative to come and save people like us. So here is the point. Our God is a God of mission who takes initiative to save people from wrath by sending His beloved Son to achieve the gracious purposes of salvation that is offered now to people from all nations.

It is this God, the ruler and creator of the universe, that gives Jesus all authority in heaven and on earth.

And then He sends Him. He says, go and seek and save the lost. Here's the point. Mission did not originate with us. Mission is not a man-made construct.

Mission initiated with God Himself. So His mission is now our mission and it's a global mission intended to reach every tribe and tongue and nation with the good news of Jesus Christ.

[17 : 49] But that's not the end of the mission. Reaching those people aren't the end of the mission. And we know that from Revelation chapter 7. The ultimate purpose of fulfilling our mission is to bring God exclusive glory in the new heavens and the new earth.

We know that from Revelation chapter 7. Revelation is a difficult book to read at times, right? But I love, here's why I love Revelation. It gives us glimpses of what we are going to enjoy on that day.

I mean, don't you look forward to that day? Here's what we're going to enjoy. This is just one of the pictures. This is one of the glimpses. Revelation chapter 7. After this, I looked.

And it's written that way because He wants us in our temporal, earthly life to say, stop. I want you to look. After this, I looked.

And what do we see? And behold, a great multitude that no one could number. Look at how this multitude is composed.

[19 : 01] How it's composed? People of? From every nation. From all tribes and peoples and languages standing before the throne and before the Lamb.

And together, crying out with a loud voice, salvation, it belongs to our God who sits on the throne and to the Lamb. And they fell on their faces before the throne and worshiped God saying, Amen.

Blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honor and power and might be to our God forever and ever. Amen.

Don't you look forward to that day? Singing in that chorus of people from every tribe and tongue and nation. You see, the great commission, it reveals God's mission and its ultimate purpose is for God to receive exclusive glory from people from all nations.

John Piper says it so succinctly and so well. Mission exists because worship doesn't. It's well said, right? And that's why sovereign grace exists.

[20 : 09] By God's grace, we are a family of churches becoming a global family of churches seeking to advance the gospel of Jesus Christ that He originated in Genesis 3.15 and continues in our day for His glory.

So, our desire to see more people gather with us on that day around that throne that we just read about, that fuels our vision and our mission.

It feels a sense of urgency and passion that we feel to go to all the nations and bring the good news of Jesus Christ.

And God has been doing in the last eight or nine years a unique work, I believe, in sovereign grace. One that we didn't plan.

One that no one in leadership can take credit for. This is all God's doing. And it's even better that none of us can take credit for it because He gets all the glory.

[21 : 12] So, let me just give you an idea of what I'm talking about. Currently, there are 75 churches outside, at least 75, it's more like 80 now, 80 churches outside the United States that are asking to be adopted into our family of churches.

We believe by God's grace that we'll adopt about 60 of those in the next two to three years. Let me just give you an idea where they're at. 11 in Africa, 15 in Latin America, 8 in Europe, and 26 in the Asia-Pacific part of the world.

Something we didn't plan and that God has just brought us to steward. So, pray that God would give us wisdom to steward it well. At the same time, within that same time frame, the Lord has been giving us good strategic leaders outside of the United States.

Men like Jeffrey Joe in the Philippines, in Manila, Philippines. Leads a church of about 1,200 in Manila, has planted 15 to 20 churches in the Philippines. Dave Taylor in Sydney, Australia.

Diona Thomas in West Africa in Monrovia, Liberia, a man that has planted several churches. Michael Granger, who's an American planting in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.

[22 : 26] Carlos Contreras, you might know that name if you've been in Sovereign Grace. He's been in Sovereign Grace 30 plus years. He's a key leader for us. José Lo Mercado is just working for us throughout Latin America.

Those men are so key because we couldn't do what we're thinking about doing and praying about doing with men like that. And then at the same time, same time frame, that through God's initiative, God has brought people, and they're members of our churches who are just being generous.

And because of their generosity, we've been able to create what we call development funds. A Latin America development fund, an Africa development fund, a Europe development fund, and an Asia-Pacific development fund.

In the last couple of years, close to \$2 million has been given to disperse throughout those development funds. And it's being used now to fuel the mission that He has given us.

We're not an organization or denomination preoccupied with numbers. I'm only sharing numbers because they explain God's activity, but we're not preoccupied with numbers.

[23 : 34] I think it's interesting, though, that in about three years, we could have more churches outside the states and inside the states. That's helpful to know, right? I tell you all that because we want to fulfill the Great Commission.

So I mentioned Jeffrey Joe, who's planting churches in the Philippines, and if you take about a four-hour drive south out of Manila, you get to the Mindanao region. And in that region, there are Muslims.

He's planting churches in Muslim communities, and some of those communities don't really want Him there. It's a bit dangerous. But he reports of Muslims being converted and coming to Christ and churches being planted.

You're a part of that. Just being a part of our family of churches. It's just one small evidence that we're trying together to fulfill this Great Commission.

And here's why we're doing it. We're not doing it to grow sovereign grace. We're doing it to reach people who don't know Christ so that more will gather with us on that day and that Christ would receive all the glory.

[24 : 42] Second thing we learn from the Great Commission, number two, we are sent by Jesus with His good news. The message of our mission is the death, is the life, death, resurrection, and resurrection of Jesus Christ because He is the one who fulfills this promise made to Abraham hundreds of years ago.

So when Jesus says to us, go therefore and make disciples of all nations, He sends us with just one message. And that is the gospel message. And that gospel message, it must be shared.

It must be spoken. It must be proclaimed for people to become disciples of Jesus Christ. That's why the first sentence that describes our shared value in sovereign grace of church planting outreach and global missions is intentionally written like this.

Our gospel centrality entails not only treasuring the gospel personally, but sharing it passionately. See, we are a family of churches.

You are a church that is commissioned by Jesus Christ to go and you are to share the good news of Jesus Christ. And by the way, the make disciples language that you see there in verse 19, it actually links mission with the local church.

[26 : 08] Eckhart Schnabel says this, the directive to make disciples demonstrates the ecclesiological dimension. Ecclesiological means local church dimension, the ecclesiological dimension of the mission.

Missionary work and church must not be separated since the very goal and purpose of the missionary work is the creation of a community of disciples, a local church.

See, that's why your gospel presence here in Athens and in East Tennessee, it's so important to what's happening throughout the world. You've got to connect that together because local and global mission, it springs from a local church.

It springs from Trinity Grace Church and it leads to the planting of new churches where discipleship occurs, where people are born again, where they grow in Christ, they're added together and local churches are formed.

So, through your local gospel outreach here and through our partnership together where we are planting and strengthening churches throughout the world, the gospel, in fact, is being proclaimed.

[27 : 16] It is being shared. And people are coming to Christ. So, let me just illustrate how that's happened. In the past two years, we have planted 13 churches.

Three in Africa, six in the Asia-Pacific part of the world, and three in the United States. In the next two years, we have 20 church plants planned throughout the world.

Let me tell you where they're at. Five in Africa, two in Latin America, one in Europe. That'll be in Italy. Eight in the Asia-Pacific part of the world, and three here in the United States.

And those three, by the way, will be churches that will be planted speaking three different languages. One English, one Chinese, Mandarin, and one Spanish.

Spanish in Yuma, Arizona, a Chinese-speaking church, probably in the Gaithersburg, Clarksburg, Maryland area, and a church that we just planted out of Covenant Fellowship, an English-speaking church in Malvern, Pennsylvania.

[28 : 18] Three churches in three different languages. But again, we're not impressed with numbers. We don't plant churches to build sovereign grace, to grow sovereign grace.

We don't. We plant churches to reach the lost with the gospel. One of the churches we planted in the past two years is Mission City Fellowship in the southeast side of San Antonio, Texas.

Philip Estrada was sent from the church in Seguin, Texas to plant in San Antonio. And he sent me an update recently where they've been reaching out to the lost, and he tells the story of just an incredible work of salvation in a man who was a slave to drugs, who was given to homosexuality, and engaged in acts of prostitution.

Lost, without hope, and enslaved to his sin. And the people of that church, they got to know him, they reached out to him, he started coming to that church, and through the preaching of the gospel, and the sharing of the gospel, and the living out of the gospel among the members, this man was born again.

And Philip reports that he is progressing in his faith. That's why we plant churches. We plant churches to reach men like that with the good news of Jesus Christ.

[29 : 50] I was in Guadalajara. One of the things that's been happening recently as I've traveled, especially since the pandemic, I am meeting people who, in our churches, who have never been in a church before.

I was in Guadalajara, Mexico, last summer, led by Roberto Estopinian. We call him Chobi. It's a lot easier for us Americans to say.

Chobi's been leading that church in Guadalajara. A church that when he went there two years ago, a little over two years ago, was 100, and through the pandemic, has grown to be 250.

They've got space issues there, and they've had to go to two services, and he's wrestling, do we need to go to three? So I was there on a Sunday, preached both services, got done preaching the second service.

I preached from Colossians 1, verses 3 through 8, and there I'm declaring the gospel, obviously. And as soon as I walked off the stage, this man came up to me, and he has tears in his eyes, and he said, this is the first time I've been in a Christian church.

[30 : 54] And what you said, through his broken English, what you said, it spoke to me, and he just began to weep more. And I said, well, you've got to, I'm so glad you're here.

You talked to Chobi, and the guys have brought you, because we were just having trouble with the language barrier. There are, I've met people like that as I've traveled. See, the pandemic has unsettled people.

They've got all kinds of questions. Many of them are turning to churches like this. And so pray that God would bring people that maybe have never been in a Christian church before, even in the Bible Belt.

Pray for that. Third thing we learned from the Great Commission, we make disciples dependent on the Holy Spirit. We make disciples dependent on the Holy Spirit.

Look at verses 19 and 20. 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've commanded you.

[32 : 02] And behold, I am with you always to the end of the age. So this commission that Jesus gives us to make disciples of all nations, as you know, is given right before His ascension.

And even though He is physically leaving this earth, He promises us, right here in verse 20, that He will always be with us. And that He will empower us.

And we know that verse 20 is a pointing to that very unique day in redemptive history, that day of Pentecost, where the Holy Spirit comes upon those in the upper room and fills them with the Spirit.

They're filled with the Spirit of God and they're empowered. And one of the things that you see there is they now have power to be witnesses for Christ. Jesus said it a little bit differently, or Luke records it a little bit differently in Acts chapter 1 verse 8.

This is Jesus speaking, but you will receive power when the Holy Spirit will come upon you. And here's what happens. And you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and all Judea and Samaria and to the end of the earth.

[33 : 09] So Jesus sends us and He is always with us through the filling of the Holy Spirit to give us power to be witnesses for Christ.

In other words, it is the Spirit of God that gives us the power to finish this unfinished task. See, one of the clear signs of being a Spirit-filled believer is that you share the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

See, our ability then to live out this value of church planting and local outreach and global missions, it is completely dependent upon the filling and the power of the Holy Spirit.

Another way to say it is our mission is a Spirit-led, Spirit-empowered mission. And that truth that you see there in verse 20, it reveals that actually our Trinitarian God is a missionary God that seeks and saves the lost.

So God the Father initiates mission in Genesis chapter 3. He promises the blessing of salvation to all of the nations in Genesis 12. And He fulfills that promise by sending God the Son, Jesus Christ, to accomplish this great salvation.

[34 : 20] And Jesus, the second person of the Trinity, through the virgin birth that we just celebrated a few weeks ago, steps into this dark world and He lives a perfect life. And He offers a perfect sacrifice for my sin and for your sin, atoning for our sin.

And three days later, what does He do? He is raised from the dead triumphantly on that third day, accomplishing salvation for sinners. And then before His ascension, He promises us, I'm going to fill you with my Spirit.

And that Spirit is going to empower you to now go to all the nations with the good news of Jesus Christ. See, every person of the Trinity, every person of the Trinity is involved in mission to reach the lost, which, I believe, gives us hope that our involvement in mission will not be in vain.

If we've got the Father, Son, and the Spirit with us, then our efforts are not going to be in vain. And it does this, it unburdens us because our ability to fulfill this great commission is never going to be able to be done in our own strength, in our own wisdom, in our own power, but in a dependence upon the Holy Spirit.

Now, I want you to hear this. We talk about this as a leadership team in Sovereign Grace. I'd love for you to come to some of our retreats and just sit and listen to our conversation.

[35 : 49] This is one of the things we remind ourselves often. We don't put our hopes in our plans and our strategies. Those are good things to do. We do some of those, but we never put our hope in those things.

We put our hope in our Trinitarian God who seeks and saves the lost, and we know He will empower our efforts to reach our neighborhoods and nations with the gospel.

Most of those church plants I just mentioned, there was no map on the wall saying, okay, let's put a pin there. We're going to plant a church in that city. It just doesn't work that way for us.

We never thought about planting a church in Reynosa, Mexico. Reynosa, Mexico, is a border city just over the border from McEllen, Texas.

It is a gang-infested, drug-infested city. It's a bad place. And sometime later this year, maybe early next year, we're planting a church there. Here's why.

[36 : 51] There was a man in Reynosa doing business work. He was working for a consulting firm, and he was traveling to Juarez every so often. And he, like Joe and Monica, they Googled, reformed, expository preaching, found Iglesia Gracia Silberana, a church of about 800 in Sovereign Grace led by Carlos Contreras.

And he just kept going back to that church. He had never experienced gospel-centered preaching and application of the gospel, sort of our gospel-centered culture. And so, as he traveled back to Juarez, time after time, he approached Carlos one day and he says, we need to plant a church like this in Reynosa.

And so, Carlos said, well, let's just pray. It was about three months after that conversation that this man, this man's boss came to him and he said, we've got so much work in Juarez.

Would you move to Juarez? Oh, I'd love to move to Juarez. So, he moves to Juarez and continues working there. He becomes, he and his family become members of the church and then has, over the last couple of years, or so, have began a dialogue with Carlos about training to send that man back with his family and a church planting team to plant in Reynosa, Mexico.

See, that is the spirit leading us, isn't it? We couldn't plan that. We're not that good, right? That is a spirit-led and it will be a spirit-empowered mission when that church is planted in Reynosa, Mexico.

[38 : 27] I tell that story because it's a reminder that our mission to make disciples of all nations is not dependent upon us. We've got to be faithful to share the good news. We've got to work hard, but it's all dependent upon the spirit leading us and empowering us.

See, we believe the work of the spirit continues today. We call ourselves continuationists, right? That's the theological term that we use. And one of the works of the spirit that is continuing today is that he empowers us for mission.

We believe the work of the spirit is necessary for our mission. So, if you have any reluctance like I do at times to share the gospel with a neighbor or with a co-worker or with someone in your community, here's what you need to do.

Just stop in your apprehension or maybe in your fear or not knowing what to say. Just stop and just ask the spirit to fill you. Pray. Just ask the spirit to fill you and to give you the words to say and you're going to be so surprised how God answers that prayer because our mission is a spirit-empowered mission.

All right, let me close with this. The gospel of Matthew, if you observe it, it ends on a note of both triumph and expectation.

[39 : 46] Triumph in the sense that Jesus now speaks these words after his death and resurrection where he defeated sin and Satan and death and he now stands on this mountain in Galilee as our triumphant savior and with his universal authority he now sends us with his triumphant gospel message.

It's triumph. Expectation in the sense that as we go we can have an expectation that he will always be with us through the filling of the spirit and the empowering of the spirit for our gospel mission and one other expectation.

The expectation that one day our mission will actually end. You see that in verse 20? Look at the second half of verse 20. He says, and behold.

Now when Jesus says that in scripture and behold he's like, hey wait a minute. Listen up. I got something important to say. I will be with you always until when?

To the end of the age. There is a day coming when Jesus will return to judge the living and the dead and on that day this age will end and he will make all things new bringing with him the new heavens and the new earth and on that day the new age will begin and on that day on that day there will be no need for mission in the new heavens and the new earth because all those that are gathered on that day all those that are judged righteous in Christ in on that day those will be the ones gathered in the new heavens and the new earth redeemed by the blood of the lamb around that throne worshiping God saying salvation it belongs to our God who sits on the throne and to the lamb.

[41 : 35] It's another reminder the ultimate purpose of our mission is in making disciples of all nations is the worship of God who sits on the throne and he is the one exclusively that is to be worshipped forever and ever by those who have been saved by the blood of Jesus Christ.

So let that eternal vision give us the expectation that there will be a day when our unfinished task will actually be finished. It will be done. And so until then brothers and sisters purpose to be a local church and let us together purpose to be a family of churches that we do this we have this desire to give our lives and our prayers and our money and our service and our effort to do this together to make disciples of all nations as we reach our neighborhoods and nations with the gospel of Jesus Christ.

And as we go we know we believe that the triumphant Savior will be with us through our spirit empowered labors to bring the gospel to people in Athens to people in Tennessee to people in Mindanao Philippines to people in South Korea knowing that those people may one day join us around the throne and they'll be singing blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honor and power and might be to our God forever and ever and may that be the purpose of our mission amen let's pray Lord I thank you for Trinity Grace Church I thank you that you planted a church here and I believe that you're going to use them even more to reach people in this area with the good news of the gospel I pray that you would use them not only in Tennessee

I pray that you would use them throughout the world fill this church with your spirit empower them and lead them I ask and pray in Jesus name amen applause no thank you stir my faith fresh you know we asked Mark to preach that message and if you're anything like me you know you can hear all those numbers feeling uncomfortable I mean he's saying it's not about the numbers but we wanted you to hear those things to hear what God's doing all throughout the world in and through this family of churches and it's a small family but we're trying to play our part but we also I wanted to hear that message because I have a deep conviction that our churches we're not trying to arrive some status of stability that's not what we're after

I'm not trying to we're not trying to get to some place of establishment with all the programs that would make us a kind of a fit church to ride into glory we're a church that's trying to hold fast to the mission of preaching the gospel at the end of the earth and you're a part of that mission like your involvement in this church is a part of that mission and we want to stay on it it is so easy and I feel it so deeply the temptation to make the mission something else church that's good that's good for the family you know something like that we want our mission to go to the end of the earth so I actually want to pray right now and invite you to stand and want to ask you step out of your comfort zone and grab a hand around you if we could all join hands together as a church we don't do this a lot in fact I don't remember when the last time we did it as we commit together scripture says to call out to the Lord of the harvest to send labors into the harvest

[45 : 47] I believe God might be sending you not just to the neighborhoods here but sending you perhaps somewhere else Father in heaven we do call out to you are the God of mission wonderfully you're the God who is taken upon flesh to come as a man to rescue us from fear and death and hell and Lord we want to be like you we want to have the heartbeat our lives be the advance of the gospel our deepest joy being the lights going on in someone's heart and mind treasuring Jesus Christ like they never have before Lord we pray that you would send us in some ways we can just think what can we offer but that's not of the Lord send us God use us answer our prayers for the Clem Jones area and other parts of this community stir the gift of leadership and men of this church and women of this church and advance the gospel God there's nothing we long for more than conversions because we know what it's like to be lost and wonderfully we know what it's like to be found so come Lord

Jesus empower us to do what we cannot do in our own strength and God let not other missions take over this mission as the heartbeat of this church in Jesus name you've been listening to a message at a Sunday celebration at Trinity Grace Church in Athens for more information about Trinity Grace please visit us at trinitygraceathens.com who knew Thank you.