

Being a Witness.

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Date: 13 October 2024

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[0 : 0 0] Morning, everyone. It's wonderful to be here. Sandy and I were in Devon yesterday, and we got back at our past nine last night because we were leading an encouraging challenge to the members of CMA. So if I fall asleep in this sermon, just give me a nudge. We're going to start with some scripture from Matthew 28, very well-known passage, the Great Commission.

What are you laughing at? The Great Commission, a very well-known passage for many Christians. So as always, when I like to do this, I do anything in capitals, that's the bit you say out loud with emphasis and enthusiasm to help it go into our souls. Okay. Father, we just pray, please, just take a hold of this time. Breathe your ruach breath into, your life into these words, and you begin, you be the one, Lord, that gets the glory in Jesus' name. So Matthew 28, verses 16 to 20.

Then the eleven disciples went to Jesus, and note what's happened shortly after that. Went to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had told them to go. When they saw him, they worshipped him, but some doubted. Isn't that incredible? So unexpected as well, at this point, Jesus has been raised from the dead. They've spent a lot of time with him, but yet some doubted. And just note, please, that he didn't berate them for doubting. It's a time when our faith is challenged, and sometimes we doubt, but God takes us through that doubt to a place of absolute assurance.

You don't run away when you doubt, you run to God with your doubt. And then verse 18 says, Then Jesus came to them and said, All authority in heaven and on earth, there is no more authority you can have them. That is the, in heaven and on earth, has been given to me. Therefore, go make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always to the very end of the age. Now I've added here verse 20 again, but in the Message Bible, which is a more contemporary language. And I love the way this is put, that Jesus says to us, I will be with you as you do this, day after day after day, right up to the end of the age.

Isn't that reassuring? For you and I today, in this place, no matter how the week has been, next slide please, how we feel, whether we want to be in church or not, if we come before God with a heart of trust and obedience and devotion and passion, He will be with us. He said, day after day, after day, after day, after day, after day, after day, right up to the end of the age. And I take great encouragement in that. Just in case anybody's here that doesn't know us, we minister the motorcycle world, so that's why the bikes are on there. But this picture, this passage, shows something that's incredibly important to the church. Not just this church, but the church of Jesus Christ throughout this earth. Now note, this was Jesus' last command to His disciples before He ascended into heaven.

[3 : 4 9] It wasn't an afterthought. Nothing had gone wrong that He had to now bring in this particular command to His church. It was the purpose of God that Christ would come and then as He ascended into heaven, He would give this command. And we, therefore, are called to be His witnesses. In other words, what we know of God through His Word, what we know of Christ through the Word and the testimony of all the New Testament writers, but also what we know of Him personally. If ever we share our personal experience of God and Jesus' love for us and how our lives have been changed, that makes a great deal of sense to people who think that God does not exist. Because it's our personal story.

And never forget that. I do meet a lot of Christians who say, I don't know what to say to people about Jesus. Well, tell them why you're in church today. Tell them what joy you have because your sins are forgiven. Tell them that grace so undeserved has been poured out upon you. And it was all God's plan in the first place. Our website and our notice board out say that WCF, Whitby Christian Fellowship, is a community of Christian believers sharing in the love of God. I love that statement. It's so obviously right how we should be. And it goes on to say, our purpose is to make disciples

who want to be with Jesus, become like Jesus and do what Jesus did. If ever you forget that in a service, just turn around and look at the wall over there. That's where it is to keep reminding us. Keep reminding us as preachers to keep focused on this fact that we are to be with Jesus, like him and do what he did.

We must be consciously, daily aware of the relationship we have with Christ as Christians who have put their trust in him and the significance of what he's called us to do. It's so important to keep track of that and keep reminding ourselves that's what we are to do. Just as God says, put on the whole armour of God, he doesn't mean it once and that's it, but keep doing it. And in the same way, I think we should be keeping our eyes, our mind, consciously focused on what God has called us to do. I listen a lot to Pastor Alistair Begg and if you've never come across him, go on YouTube. There's some wonderful, wonderful Bible teaching he does. And he has a church in Ohio, although he's from Scotland.

Excuse me. And he recently encouraged his church to carry on or to carry out a risk assessment of their vision to ensure that they were on track to achieve God's purpose. And I think that's a really wise thing to do. And he put it this way, we need to assess what we're doing, why we're doing what we're doing and to consider how we're doing what we're doing as we consider why we're doing it. [7 : 00] If you read it a few times, it starts to make a great deal of sense, but we need to assess who we are in Christ and what we're doing as disciples of his. It's so important that we ask, why are we doing this?

Because God's called us to. And to consider how we're doing it. In other words, sometimes we do things that just don't work and we just need to perhaps shelve them and then consider what we're doing and why we're doing it. Excuse me. I've been talking too much this weekend. Nothing new there.

So with this indescribable treasure of knowing Christ, comes an essential and urgent responsibility. One that you and I cannot and must not ignore. Oh, you blessing. Look at this. I'm going to give you a hug. Thank you so much, Maria. She is such a star.

Can we have a round of applause for Maria? Thank you. I'm going to preach now with a throat lozenger in.

[8 : 22] I love you, Maria. You are awesome. You know, it takes courage to stand up there and walk up and just do what you do. Thank you so much. So, with this indescribable treasure we have of knowing Christ, comes an essential and urgent responsibility.

A responsibility that is so big it cannot be ignored. And one that you and I together, as well as individually, should not ignore.

We are a church. We are a church family. And we to encourage each other to do what God has called. Incidentally, to do it irrespective of how weak we feel, how inadequate we feel, and how little we mistakenly believe we have to offer.

Not one of you here who has put your trust in God is without spiritual gifts and abilities that God has equipped us with to do this.

Therefore, the Great Commission commands us to go. You know, many people have heard the command to go, but still are where they were when they heard the command.

[9 : 45] And I understand why. But Hudson Taylor, the great missionary to China, points out so clearly that the Great Commission is not an option to be considered.

It's a command to be obeyed. And that makes such a difference, doesn't it? A good idea is not always God's idea, but God's command is always God's purpose.

In this broken town of Whitby and the Moreland community that many of us live in, people I've found, and further afield that we go, people realize that they have inadequate answers to questions about their lives.

They always say to me, so often non-Christians, I'm not religious. And I always say, thank goodness for that.

Because God does not want you to be religious. He wants you to have a relationship with Him. And we were listening to John Lennox recently, the great Bible explorer.

[10 : 55] And he said recently, you know, there's a difference between religion and Christianity. And I've never really seen it in this way, but he made it sound so clear.

And I hope I can remember enough of it to make it clear to you. But he was saying with religions, you have to be and do so that at the end of your life on this earth, you will gain Nirvana, a hope, a

paradise, or whatever.

But with Christianity, when you say to Jesus, God, forgive me, come into my life, take me who I am, right there and then you gain heaven.

And assurance that what you've put your trust in begins here, not when you die. It goes on that when you die on this earth, you live for eternity.

What a difference. What a great example of the difference between religion. And so I want to say to you, based on that thought alone, this, excuse me, this great commission is not something you have to do to depend on to get to heaven.

[12 : 08] It's the wonder and the mystery of grace that says we are saved when we put our trust in God. But then God says, I want you to work with me.

You may not think you've offered anything to offer, but I want you to work with me in bringing other people to this place you're at.

And I've never forgotten when this passage was first preached to me, it was in 1980 at Keswick Convention, so many of you probably heard me endlessly go on about it, but I'll never stop.

The Great Commission, go. And I'm sat there thinking, yes, people should go. And then I heard the pastor who was preaching at the time, therefore say, which I'll refer to again in a minute, that the fields are ripe unto harvest.

Therefore, Lord, pray that God will send out laborers to the harvest to bring in the harvest, the souls. And I'm sat there saying, yes, these clever people, these people who've been to university, because I haven't, these people who've been to Bible college, because I haven't, people who are clever enough to know the depths of the Bible in a way that I don't, send them, Lord.

[13 : 21] And God said, I'm calling you. And he said it so clearly. And my first question was, why me? But then I realized it's not about me.

I'm clay in the potter's hand. So are you. The God has placed in our heart a passion that bumbles through sometimes, but people see the reality of him in us, because we're not hiding behind a facade of eloquence and brilliance.

And I'm not putting down people like that. Far from it. So the Great Commission is not an option to be considered, but it's a command to be obeyed because God has equipped us for it.

So sadly, so often when people have these questions of inadequacy that they need answering, half the time it's because they've been faced with a terminal illness, or their family or family member has, or they've lost a close friend.

It's all about the end of life to them. And we need to wake them up to the fact that end of life can be the beginning of life if we've put our trust in God. And because they have this mindset, they lack peace and purpose.

[14 : 35] And then they try to fill the hole in their soul with stuff like I used to do before I became a Christian. I knew there was a longing, but I thought I had to fill it.

Never once gave a thought that there would be a God who could do that or would want to do that. But as you fill the hole in your soul with stuff that's what you think is going to help, bigger house, nice car, lots of motorcycles, increasingly you find that increasingly your soul becomes emptier because of the stuff you're trying to possess and fill it with.

I once spoke to a man I knew who was a multimillionaire. He wasn't a Christian. And he was driving his Bentley, Roll Royce, whatever it was, and I said to him, how are you doing?

It was about three o'clock in the morning. He was just coming home. I said, how are you doing? He said, I'm not doing very well at all. I've just had seven heart attacks in two weeks.

And he said, it's making me think of all this stuff. It's completely worthless. Don't wait till that point.

[15 : 50] If you don't know God today, don't leave before you come and speak to one of them. Because the more you throw into that hole, the more emptier it will become, the more painful and lack of peace you will have.

And so that cycle will continue. You see, because the crisis that needs dealing with is our sin. And that's where we get the peace and the purpose and a great deal more.

We need a saviour who will pay our debt. And it says in that wonderful old hymn, there was no other good enough to pay the price of sin.

He only could unlock the door of heaven and let us in. Next slide, please. Oh, then that hymn goes on. Oh, dearly, dearly, has he loved.

And we must love him too and trust in his redeeming love and try his works to do. Not works to gain salvation, but to serve and be walking with God and working for him.

[16:55] I was looking for something. So were you before you became a Christian. And if we were to put it into words, I couldn't have at the time, but on reflection, I can say I was looking for something to rely on, something to believe in, and something to trust that wouldn't let me down.

You know, relationships are often broken and people think that that would be the same if they were to come to God and it's nothing like that. You see, it's not something we need, it's someone. And that someone is Jesus. That might sound a little bit cheesy, but it's truth. It always has been the truth, always will be the truth.

And we should communicate that to those we're trying to reach. That's simple truth. So God commands us as a church to obey the Great Commission because the heart of God seeks to save those who are lost.

And I love it in Matthew 9, in the message, I'm going to read from there. In Matthew 9, it talks about Jesus made a circuit of all the towns and villages. He taught in their meeting places, reported kingdom use, and healed their diseased bodies, healed their bruised and broken lives.

[18:11] But when he looked out over the crowd, his heart was broken, moved by compassion. He saw them as confused and aimless.

They were like sheep without a shepherd. And then Jesus said, look at this, what a huge harvest. The field is ready for harvest. But how few workers there are.

So, get on your knees and pray for the harvest hands to bring in the harvest. That's how the Message Bible puts it. And then 2 Peter 3, 9 says that God is patient with us, not wanting anyone to perish, but for everyone to come to repentance, to know him.

All this, and all to do with this actual command and commission of God, all comes back to John 3, 16. Jesus speaking to Nicodemus.

If you don't know any Bible verse off by heart, learn this. I think every time I preach, I speak about this verse at least once in the process of a sermon. Nothing wrong with that.

[19:17] Like we sang, because God so loved the world, he gave his son, that whoever, whoever, whoever believes in him will be saved. So therefore, Jesus commands us, the church, to go because he came, because he was sent.

And Luke 19, 10 says, for the son of man, Jesus came to seek and to save the lost. That's the purpose. Jesus cleansed both heaven and earth from sin by defeating the one who stained heaven and earth with sin, or at least earth with sin, should I say.

Satan wants to separate all of humankind from the presence of God and the life in all its fullness that he offers. So God calls us to go and make disciples that they may have this life.

John 10, 10 says, the thief, Satan comes to steal, kill and destroy. Jesus says, I've come that you may have life and that you may have life in abundance.

It's so simple, isn't it? So obvious when you know it, yet so often ignored. Why is it that the Great Commission is the complete opposite to many churches' visions?

[20:41] Dallas Willard, John will be pleased, I'm quoting something from one of his books. Dallas Willard wrote a book. I didn't know he'd actually written this book, but I had already thought of the title of the book and then found out he'd written it.

I wasn't going to write a book, I just thought it'd make a good title. It's called The Great Omission rather than The Great Commission. And it's referred to as being a book that's reclaiming Jesus' essential teachings on discipleship.

It's so, so important. And Dallas Willard goes on to say that Jesus' last command to us to go and make disciples. Sorry, that was his last command. Yet many churches have responded by making Christians.

Now let me just try and explain that to you. There's a difference between somebody saying I'm a Christian when they go into hospital and say what religion are you? As opposed to I'm a disciple of Jesus.

I'm a follower of Christ. That's a whole different ballgame, isn't it? Do you understand what I mean by that? People have grown up in a family where their family tradition may have been Catholic or Methodist, Church of England or one of those kind of things so that when anybody ever says to them do you believe?

[22 : 00] Like I said to somebody recently do you believe in God? And her response was well I'm a Catholic. I didn't quite follow that. Do you believe in God?

Have you put your trust in the living God who's the saviour of all men who believe? I get excited when I talk like that and some people start taking steps away.

No, don't go. I want to tell you more about this. Because it's not a case of being denominationally thought of but it's have you that relationship.

And that's what it means to be a disciple. So Dallas Willard is saying that churches have responded to the Great Commission by making Christians rather than discipling those Christians to be people who will go out and share that gospel.

Someone else said if you make disciples you always get a church. But if you just make a church you're rarely going to have disciples because people are so focused on the church rather than the mission of the church that we're part of.

[23 : 07] And people have often aligned themselves with a church building. Great, if you get involved in what the church is doing and it's actually doing the commission of God or a specific group that entertains them rather than preaching the word of God.

I'm sure you know what I mean by that. Or align themselves to a denomination as I said earlier that they were born into rather than Jesus Christ. Christ. And finally Dallas Willard from his perspective challenges the idea that we can call ourselves Christians if we don't apply our faith through every aspect of our lives.

Otherwise we're just pretending or just playing. There should be absolutely no aspect of our lives whatsoever that God is not in control of or we seek to sacrifice to God for him to be in control of.

Next slide please. Oh sorry there's another quote from Dallas Willard. Sorry. He goes on to say the New Testament is a book about disciples by disciples for disciples of Jesus Christ and what this broken world needs today are those who call themselves Christians to wake up and become true disciples of Jesus.

Amen to that. but wonder why it is that so many people who call themselves Christians don't engage in the mission that God has called us to.

[24 : 38] Perhaps they've nothing to say they think or because perhaps the kind of relationship they have with Jesus isn't worth sharing which is incredibly sad.

See if we try to keep God at arm's length he will always be at arm's length rather than passionately bursting our hearts every day in a way that we can't keep it to ourselves.

A man with the most unusual Christian name I've ever read about is called Curry R. Blake. I love Curry not sure I want it as my name but Curry R. Blake was a man who said that if the gospel if your gospel sorry isn't touching others it's probably not touching you and I read a little bit about why he said that and it turned out that this was his story because Curry R. Blake wanted to witness the power of God in his life and share his story with as many people as possible.

Turned out at 17 months of age Curry was hit by a car in his driveway when his dad reversed out the garage. His dad didn't know he was there and the car went over his head and ripped off his ear. His granddad came out found what the problem was gathered up his grandson and the ear dashed off to hospital with all the family and the doctors came out to see them and said to his mother you need to go buy a coffin to plan his funeral.

[26 : 06] There's no way this child will survive such extensive brain damage but Curry's mother was a passionate lady who totally trusted God and she got on her knees and began to pray.

She told God that if she would spare Curry's life she would raise him and train him to serve him. God if you're going to let him live she said then heal him completely. And after the surgery doctors came out and said well we can't find any signs of brain damage but if he lives there's always a but isn't there?

But if you put faith in God God does takes care of the but's but the doctor said but if he lives and even if he doesn't have any brain damage he will never have any hair and he will never hear out of his right ear so his mother got on his knees again and continued to pray pray and pray.

Today Curry is a totally healed man who serves God as a missionary in a great commission and he has at least an average IQ and a full head of hair and he's perfect hearing in both ears.

Now you don't have to go to the extent of that experience to be able to go and tell people about what God's done.

[27 : 21] Every time when we have an evening service and we have testimonies or we meet people for coffee or we talk in the cafe area or you come to the dinner or whatever it is you talk to each other don't we?

It's always the case we talk to each other about what God's done what God's doing just keep doing it but do it not just to Christians do it to non-Christians even if they think you're weird do it.

And this passage that we read spoke of where Jesus made a claim that only he could make that all authority in heaven and on earth has been given to us to him I beg your pardon.

And Luke 24 says this after the resurrection on the road to Emmaus Jesus meets two disciples who are very confused and had inadequate answers to questions that were on their hearts they didn't really understand what had happened they'd seen Jesus crucified and then they met Jesus on the road but because they were so preoccupied they didn't realise who he was so Jesus began to explain about Moses and the prophets from scripture and explained to them what was said in all the scriptures concerning himself then he opened their minds so they could understand the scriptures and told them this is what is written in the Old Testament and it's about me the Messiah will suffer rise from the dead on the third day and repentance for the forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations the Great Commission beginning at Jerusalem you are witnesses of these things I'm going to send you I'm going to send you what my father has promised that on the day of Pentecost you will receive power

Acts chapter 1 when the Holy Spirit comes upon you and you'll be my witnesses in Jerusalem and all Judea and Samaria and to the furthest ends of the earth Pentecost the Holy Spirit was given not on the believers but in dwelling Holy Spirit that we have today Bethlehem when Christ was born was God with us Calvary was God for us but Pentecost was God in us and without Pentecost there could be no Great Commission you and I would be unable to do anything but God has said go make disciples and incidentally Jesus didn't say it was going to be easy he told the truth but that mustn't deter us from going and you know when you go and you try and share the gospel or teach people talk to people N.T. Wright said people often get upset when you teach what is in the Bible rather than what they presume is in the Bible because it convicts them rightly so but it's God who convicts others not us and a disciple of Jesus is someone who wants to learn from him and chooses to live like him that's what we are to be and that's what we are encouraged by God to go and make a disciple is an apprentice of Jesus being with Jesus in every aspect of our daily lives becoming like Jesus so that the world may see Jesus not us and to do what

[30 : 36] Jesus did so that God will get the glory not us the apostle Paul described it in this way nearly finished Acts 20 24 he says but my life is worth nothing to me unless I use it for finishing the work assigned to me by the Lord Jesus the work of telling others the good news about the wonderful grace of God if we're not disturbed by how little power we have in our own ability we will never be desperate enough to ask God for his power to work through us never get in the way of God's purpose and then Paul said in Philippians 1 20 he said I fully expect and hope that I will never be ashamed but that I will continue to be bold for Christ as I have in the past and I trust that my life will bring honour to Christ whether I live or die at the time he was facing death now just to completely finish this

I want to read to you something that some of you will have heard again but it never harms to hear it again in 1980 it was written by a pastor who knew he was about to die because he refused to renounce his faith in Christ it says this written from his heart it's I think like the ultimate description of what it means to be a disciple of Jesus he says I'm part of the fellowship of the unashamed I'm not ashamed of Christ the die has been cast and I've stepped over the line the decision is made I'm a disciple of his and I will not look back even though I'm going to die because of it I won't let up I won't slow down I won't back away and I will not be still my past is forgiven and redeemed my present makes sense my future is secure i.e.

I'm going to die tomorrow and my future is absolutely secure and he said at this point I am finished with low living sight walking rather than faith small planning not expecting much of God smooth knees colourless dreams tamed visions mundane talking cheap living and dwarf goals I no longer need preeminence prosperity position authority in that sense promotions people looking at me plaudits or popularity he says I don't need that anymore I don't want to be right I want to be I don't want to be first I don't want to be top of the list I don't want to be recognised praised or rewarded I live by faith I lean on Jesus in his presence I walk by patience I lift my prayers and it lifts my soul and I labour by his Holy

Spirit power not my own and he says my face is set toward heaven my gate the way I walk is fast my goal is heaven my road may be narrow my way rough my companions few but my guide is reliable the Holy Spirit and my mission is clear and he finishes it by saying I will not be bought I won't be compromised I won't be detoured I won't be lured away turn back deluded or delayed I will not flinch in the face of sacrifice that cost me or hesitate in the presence of the adversary I will not negotiate at the table of the enemy I will not ponder at the pool of popularity or meander in the maze of mediocrity quite poetic you know what it means but he finishes by saying I won't give up I won't shut up I won't let up until I've stayed up stored up prayed up paid up and preached up for the cause of

Christ I am a disciple of Jesus and I must not give up I will not give up until I drop preach until all know and work until he comes and when he does come when Jesus does return and he comes for his own he'll have no problem recognising me but because my colours will be clear I'm his and that's the prayer I have for me and I have that for you as well but we could even say one line in that when he comes I want him to know us for who we are we are his disciples of Christ Amen!

[35 : 35] Amen skill skill