

Matthew 28:16-20

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[0 : 00] Amen. New friends as well. I look forward to spending some time with you throughout the day.

I wonder, do you ever wonder what the purpose of the church is? Do you ever ask yourself, what is the point of the church?

If you were to walk outside after our service this morning and someone were to stop you and say, well, what have you just been doing? Why the church? What is its purpose?

What is its point? What would you say to them? What would be your answer? Maybe some of you are actually asking that very question this morning. You perhaps have been a Christian for a number of years.

Or maybe you are just a relatively new Christian. Or maybe you're not even a Christian at all. And you're just investigating Christianity and Christ and the church. And you're wondering, what is the church?

[1 : 24] Why the church? What is its point? What is its purpose? Why do we do what we do Sunday by Sunday? It's a good question to ask, but many Christians are confused, I would say, about the answer to that question.

It's vital to know why we exist. It's vital to know what the purpose, the unique purpose of the church is. And so when I found out this morning that I was going to be preaching at the service where you would be commissioning the new church plant in Brentford, I thought it made sense to preach on the passage that we generally call the Great Commission at the end of Matthew's Gospel. Because here, here in this passage, right at the end of Matthew's Gospel, we have Jesus himself having ridden from the dead, setting out in capsule form, as it were, the main purpose, or one of the main purposes of the church.

Here Jesus himself explains, in just a few short sentences, what the fundamental points and purpose and mission of the church is.

Which is what? Well it's this. It's to get the Gospel out. It's to tell people about the Lord Jesus Christ, about who he is, and about all that he's done.

[2 : 48] It's to spread the message of a crucified and now risen Saviour. That is what Jesus is basically saying here to these eleven disciples, and indeed through them to the whole church of Jesus Christ.

He is saying to them, I have defeated death, I have dealt with your sin, I have crushed Satan underfoot, now go and tell people about me.

that is what I'm calling you to do. That is why we exist. That is the point of the church, that will be the point of the new church plants in Brentford, to make Jesus known.

After all, just ask yourself this, which other organisation is going to do that? There is no other organisation, there is no corporation, there is no company, there is no other charity, whose purpose it is to tell people the gospel, to spread the message of Jesus Christ.

Only the church will do that, only the church must do that. Our purpose is glorious. There is no greater mission statement than the one that the church has, which is, in a nutshell, to proclaim the excellencies of Jesus Christ.

[4 : 06] There is no more excellent person than the Lord Jesus himself, and it is your privilege as Christians to proclaim those excellencies, the all-sufficiency, the grace, the glory of Jesus Christ to a needy and a sinful world.

And we should note as well that this is an epoch-shifting purpose. What do I mean by that? It means something that changes the world forever.

Something that is world-shattering, something that is history-defining. That is why, if you notice, in verse 16, Jesus meets these eleven disciples on a mountain.

That location is significant. It's not a mere geographical detail. We're not sure exactly which mountain it was, but we do know that throughout the Bible, authoritative teaching, fresh revelation that drives the purposes of God forward, they are often given on a mountain.

You just have to think about the Ten Commandments that we read earlier on. Given to Moses where? On a mountain, on Mount Sinai. Jesus himself. His famous sermon on the Mount.

[5 : 24] Fresh revelation, authoritative teaching, driving the purposes of the Kingdom of God forward. and that is what we see happening here as well with this great commission.

This is a history-defining, an epoch-shifting event that is going on here. Jesus here is presented by Matthew as the victorious king who has conquered the greatest enemy, death and sin and Satan. The victorious king who is sending out his foot soldiers to lay claims of a territory that is rightfully his. Jesus here is, if you will, our commander-in-chief and he is setting us out, he is sending you out on the most momentous mission imaginable.

And so that's what I want to focus on in our time together this morning, the mission of the church, the purpose of the church, what it is that Jesus calls his disciples and through them as the foundation of the church, through them he calls us to do, to carry on that same mission.

And I want to look at it under three main headings, the three-point sermon, traditional sermon formats, that's what you get with me I'm afraid. But three main points that I want to consider with you this morning.

[6 : 44] The first one is this, that Jesus' power fuels mission. Jesus' power is what fuels mission. He said that in verse 18.

Just look down at that. And Jesus came and said to them all authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Jesus is saying I have a power that is unsurpassed, an authority that you cannot measure.

I have defeated death, I have crushed sin, I have conquered Satan. All authority is now mine. All authority in heaven and on earth.

In other words, everyone, everywhere, there is no exception, everyone, everywhere, is under my authority as the one who is Lord of all.

Angels and saints, devils and demons, men and women, boys and girls, kings and queens, prime ministers and presidents, animals and plants, sun, moon and stars, you name it, it's his.

[7 : 53] Jesus is the master of the universe. Jesus is the king of the cosmos. That is who Matthew is presenting to us here.

You remember back in the first chapter of Matthew, Jesus there is presented as the one who is the great son of who? Of King David.

And then in chapter 2, who is it that worships Jesus? It's the wise men coming from the nations and they come to worship the one born king of the Jews.

And then at the end of his life, Jesus is crucified, albeit in a mocking fashion, he's crucified as the king of the Jews. And now Matthew presents Jesus as the king whose authority transcends all national boundaries, whose authority transcends all intergalactic boundaries, an authority that is over everyone, everywhere.

He is the king of all. But maybe some of you are asking this question, didn't Jesus have all authority anyway?

[9 : 13] After all, is he not the son of God? And does not the son of God possess all authority? And that is true.

He does possess all authority eternally, as the son of God. And so here we find Jesus speaking of a new kind of authority authority into which he has entered.

An authority that he now possesses not, as it were, natively or essentially, simply by who he is as the eternal son of God.

No, this is an authority that he has entered into as a result of his death and resurrection. You might call it an exalted messianic authority, an exalted messianic authority.

An authority that comes from, based upon, derivative of all of his completed work that he accomplished on earth. Maybe you can think about it this way.

[10 : 20] One of the most startling stories over the past season, particularly for football fans, is the success of Leicester City. I cannot believe that they are about to win the Premier League.

It's astonishing, isn't it? Now, at the start of the season, Claudio Ranieri possessed authority as the manager of Leicester City. He had that authority was native to him as the manager. But think about the authority that he now possesses, having just won or about to win the Premier League. He has, as it were, entered into a new kind of authority based upon the success of this past season.

Think of all the players that are now going to want to come and play under him. Think about all the other bigger clubs that might be interested in hiring him. He's entered into, as it were, a new kind of authority on the basis of all of the glorious work that he and his team have done over the past season.

That is something like what Jesus is speaking of here. Almost against all the odds, Leicester have triumphed. In a similar way, Jesus, against all the odds, hanging on a cross, doesn't look much like the triumphant king.

[11 : 35] But against all the odds, he has won the ultimate victory over death and sin and Satan. And now he has entered into his messianic authority, something that he did not possess before.

And this is why you should note, Jesus speaks of this authority as having been given to him. All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.

Given by who? Given by his father, his heavenly father. Why? Well, as the reward for perfectly fulfilling the rescue mission that the father sent the Lord Jesus upon.

For perfectly carrying out and accomplishing and fulfilling his own commission. His own commission to be born of the virgin.

His own commission to live the perfect life for all of his people. His own commission to die a sin bearing death as his people substitute on the cross.

[12 : 39] Bearing their punishment in their place. His own commission to rise again from the grave, triumphant. He's now fulfilled his commission to save sinners.

And notice what that means. Notice what that means. It means that our commission as a church, the commission of Emmanuel Church in Brentford, is rooted in the commission that Jesus himself undertook.

Our commission flows out of his commission and the success of our commission is guaranteed by the success of his commission.

You see, the great commission, as we call it, has as its propulsive force an even greater commission that drives it forward.

Our commission is driven forward ineluctably, powerfully, by the commission that Jesus himself undertook and fulfilled.

[13 : 51] And isn't that such a relief for us? Isn't that such a relief for us? As we go out into the world, seeking to fulfill this great commission, as churches are planted, as people are sent abroad or sent to other places in this country, isn't it wonderful that we don't go on our own authority?

authority. We go on the authority of King Jesus, who has all authority. We are weak, we are frail, we are sinful, but we have an all-conquering power at our disposal.

That's what you as a church need to remember, that's what Emmanuel Church Brentford needs to remember. I look at Stuart and he is someone that knows weakness and frailty, but at his disposal, at the church's disposal, is an all-conquering power that will never fail them.

And he uses, as well, doubting worshippers. We should note that. It says there in verse 17, when the disciples saw him, they worshipped him, but some doubted.

I actually think there's some people that think that there are two different groups, there's some that are worshipping, others that are doubting. I tend to think that those who worship also those who simultaneously doubt. Isn't that so often what our experience is like?

[15 : 23] We can be full of worshipful joy and confidence and yet at the same time, that is punctuated, that is tarnished somewhat by doubt.

Doubt about who Jesus is, does he really love me, can I do this, he's called me to do. He uses doubting worshippers. He doesn't use strong people. He doesn't use strong people.

All the power is his. He uses people like you, people like me, who are weak, who doubt, who are frail. But we have an all-conquering power at our disposal.

Secondly, Jesus' program directs mission. We've seen that Jesus' power fulfills, excuse me, fuels mission. And now we see that Jesus' program directs mission.

Just look at verse 19 through to the start of verse 20. Jesus says, 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.

[16:26] Here we have Jesus, the victorious king, laying out this program for his church, for his people to follow. And you can see what the key goal of this program is.

It's to make disciples. That is where the emphasis lies in this verse. The emphasis is on the making of disciples, the making of disciples from all nations.

Jesus is saying here, because I am Lord of all, because all authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me, I want people from all nations to follow me, to be my disciples.

disciples. Which raises the question, how is this done? How does the church go about seeking to make disciples? And thankfully for us, Jesus tells us in three broad ways how the church is to go about making disciples.

We don't need to invent our own programs. We have the program of Christ himself to direct our purpose as a church. First of all, we make disciples by going.

[17:38] Go therefore and make disciples of all nations. It's an obvious point I know, but it's worth stressing. We need to go into all nations in order to make disciples, because that's where potential disciples live.

You won't make disciples by staying put. And what's interesting here is that this signals a vital watershed, a dramatic shift in the plans of God.

Earlier on in Matthew's Gospel in chapter 10, Jesus had sent his apostles out to the house of Israel. And he had specifically said to them, do not go to the Gentiles.

Do not go to the Samaritans. Go to the house of Israel. But now, now he says, go out to all nations. Go to the whole world, because of my cosmic authority that I have now inaugurated as the risen king.

And again, this is rooted in Jesus' own going. Can you imagine Jesus, the son of God, in eternity saying to the father, well, yeah, I like the plan to save sinners, but I really don't fancy going.

[18:58] Of course not. He delighted him to be sent by his father to come and save his people. It delighted him to go into the world himself in order to fulfil his own commission.

He came, and so we too must go. Now the emphasis here is on the church itself going into the world with the message of the gospel.

Preachers, ministers going out, missionaries going out, declaring the good news of Jesus Christ. But it also, I think, entails Christians, just generally Christians, whoever you are, going out into work, going out into school, going out into the community in which you live, going out into your neighbours' homes, even perhaps as it were going out into your own families.

That is what we are to be about as Christians. Going out. The Christian life you see is not static. The Christian life is dynamic.

It has this dynamic force to it. And for those of you with children, what is your mission field? Where do you go? Oh, your children. Well, children are your mission field.

[20:18] I remember one time a lady speaking to someone, feeling utterly bereft and down because she just wasn't speaking to that many non-Christians. she had done as a younger woman when she was at university.

I think she'd seen quite a few of her friends come to Christ and now she was a bit older, she had a couple of kids and she just, time was taken up with her children. And she was downcast because she didn't feel like she was fulfilling the great commission and her minister said to her, your mission field is your children.

That's your primary focus. You should be teaching them, praying for them. Maybe that is an encouragement to some of you. So we go to make disciples and secondly, we make disciples by baptising.

Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. That's interesting, isn't it?

It's interesting, why does Jesus think baptism is so important? I mean, isn't baptism just an optional extra?

[21:30] That's the way a lot of people think about baptism, isn't it? It's clearly vital to Jesus that we baptise people.

There are many reasons why, but I think in context, the main reason is because it's the mark, it's the physical sign, if you will, that you have been initiated into the school of Jesus Christ and you have begun his discipleship lessons.

I mean, that's what it means to be a disciple, it means to be a learner, a follower, someone who sits, as it were, at the feet of Jesus and listens to him. baptism marks you out as belonging exclusively to him.

It's a gracious sign and seal and mark that he puts upon you and says, now come, I love you, now learn from me, learn in my glorious school.

Baptism, I think, is a bit like a wedding ring. You know how in a marriage, the husband and the wife exchange rings and those rings signify that they belong exclusively to one another.

[22 : 50] In this deep, personal, intimate relationship, baptism is, as it were, the wedding ring that God places upon the fingers of his disciples.

And he says to them in their baptism, I love you, you are mine. And that's why I think Jesus' disciples are baptized into the new covenant name of God.

The God who is one and the God who is three. God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. When you were baptized, my friends, when you were baptized, God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit all said to you, whether you were aware of it or not, they all said to you with one unified voice, I love you, and I have set you apart for myself.

You are my disciples. Now learn from me, and go out in my name. So we make disciples by going, by baptizing, and then finally by teaching.

Go therefore, make disciples of all nations, baptizing them into the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. You see, Jesus' disciples, they need to grow up.

[24 : 20] We need to, we need to mature, don't we? We need to be nurtured in our faith. In fact, I think that's actually where the emphasis in many ways lies. Jesus doesn't say, go and make Christians.

That's, as it were, his job. He says, go and make disciples. Train people up. Yes, proclaim the gospel, seek converts, of course. It doesn't exclude that in any way. But the emphasis, I think, is on training people up, making disciples.

And we need to be taught. We need to be taught if we're to grow up in the ways of Christ, don't we? If we're going to graduate from being babes in Christ to mature adults, we need to be taught.

And what is it we need to be taught? All that Jesus has commanded. The whole truth of God's, from Genesis 1 through to Revelation 22, I think it is.

The whole Bible. We need to expose ourselves to it. We need to sit under the preaching and the teaching of his words. And we are to observe all that he's commanded.

[25 : 24] His teaching is intensely practical. And this is, I would say, the particular responsibility of ordained ministers, those men that God has set apart to preach and to teach his words.

It's here, it's right here, right now, that is the key element of your discipleship. Yes, one-on-ones are very, very useful. Home groups are very useful.

But it's right here, right now, at the worship service, sitting under the preached words, the authoritative preaching of God's word, that you are being disciplined, that you are being assured, that you are being nurtured in the ways of Christ.

I remember when I was at primary school, I thought I knew it all. I thought I was so clever, and then I went to secondary school, and I realised I didn't, but after a few years, I again thought I knew it all. And then I went off to university, and I quickly discovered that I didn't know it all. There was a whole ocean of knowledge out there that I would never grasp, and the older I get, the more I realise is how little I do know.

[26 : 33] As I study God's word, there's more and more that I am just completely ignorant of. And it's a bit like that in the school of Christ. We are students in his school, and we are growing in knowledge, but the more that we sit at the feet of Jesus, the more we realise we'll never plumb the depths of his glory and his truth.

But this is the best school imaginable. Let me just stress that. I know perhaps some of you, school isn't such a happy experience, or perhaps wasn't such a happy experience when you were younger, but this is the best school imaginable, because Jesus is the teacher.

He knows all, and he is merciful to you. And sometimes we get things wrong, don't we? We make errors. We don't always observe all that he commands us to do. But every day we fall short, don't we? And he's not a teacher that brings out the cane. I know they don't have canes anymore. He's not that sort of teacher that slaps you down when you get it wrong. He's the sort of teacher that says, don't worry. He picks you up again. He's merciful. He's kind. He's patient. So Jesus' program is what directs mission.

[27 : 49] And then finally, we see that Jesus' presence is what sustains mission. His presence is what sustains mission. And behold, I am with you always to the end of the age.

Jesus promises to his disciples that he will sustain them in their work of making disciples all the way up to the ends of history. Now of course, Jesus isn't going to be with his disciples bodily.

He's about to ascend back up into heaven. But he will be with them spiritually. And if you can see my notes, you see that I've got a capital S there.

He will be with them by his Holy Spirit whom he will send out upon them at Pentecost. This is how Jesus continues to be with his church today.

This is how he is with you right now. He is with you by his Holy Spirit. And in fact, this is fascinating, I think.

[28 : 55] Jesus has even said that it is to the disciples' advantage that he goes away so that the helper, the Holy Spirit, can come to them.

He talks about that in John chapter 16. It's actually better for us that he is not here bodily, but spiritually.

do you ever think, I think this anyway, do you ever think that your church would be better off if only Jesus were actually here in the flesh?

Well, let me put it this way. This is what will bring it home to you perhaps. Would you rather have me, or Paul, or Stuart preaching to you right now, or Jesus?

It's a bit of a no-brainer, I suppose. But Jesus is saying that it's actually to our advantage that he will go away, and that the Spirit will come, and that is how he will be present with us.

[30 : 10] You are actually better off, we are better off now, than the disciples were during his 33 years on this earth. And there are many reasons for this, but here's one.

Now the proclamation of the gospel can indeed go to all nations, to the farthest shores. You see, if it depended upon Jesus being here bodily, then there's a sense in which the gospel could only really go where Jesus himself was, located.

it. But now we can go to all nations, because by his Spirit he is present with his people, wherever they go, wherever his disciples go, they go in the presence of Jesus, by his Spirit.

And that is a presence that lifts us, that is a presence that gives us confidence and boldness to actually go to all nations.

I remember when I was at Duke Street a few years ago now, we cobbled together a cricket team, and we were not a particularly good cricket team, let me tell you. I even had me opening the batting, just because I could basically play a sort of forward defensive, I knew how to keep a straight bat.

[31 : 29] We were a pretty poor cricket team, but we did have one guy who was very, very, very good, it was this South African called Mike, and his sheer presence with us lifted the team, because he's someone that hit six virtually every delivery, and he had a really fast delivery.

He was just a great player. I remember we were always really worried when we gathered together and he wasn't there yet, he was running a bit late, but as soon as he came it lifted us and we all played at least a little bit better as a result.

If Jesus were not with us, by the power of his Holy Spirit, we would soon lose heart, wouldn't we? We would give up, we would go home. But Jesus' presence with us at all times gives us great boldness and great confidence.

And it means that even when only two or three people gather together, sure, that's disheartening, but we don't despair because Jesus is with us.

You see, Jesus is as much with us in our twos and in our threes as he is in our hundreds and our thousands. And sometimes it might not feel as if Jesus is with you.

[32 : 47] It might not feel that way, but it is a fact. It's a promise. Jesus says, I will be with you always. Not just most of the time, but always, to the end of the age, to the end of history, I will be with you at all times.

Sometimes, when you're perhaps going through difficult periods, when the dark clouds gather, it doesn't feel as if Jesus is with you. When your church is struggling, as no doubt it has done, or perhaps it will in the future, it may not feel as if Jesus is with you.

But it is a fact. And we base our lives, we base our faith, not upon the way we feel, but upon what is revealed to us, what is fact, what is true.

And the fact is, as Jesus himself says here, he is with us always. He will be with you wherever you go, as you go out into work during the week, as you face a difficult boss, as you face struggles in your home, difficulties at school, difficulties in your neighbourhood, wherever it might be, Jesus goes with you.

You are never alone. His abiding presence sustains you and keeps you going. And so we see that we have great responsibility as Christians.

[34 : 04] This is rightly called, I think, the Great Commission. It is indeed a Great Commission. This is the point of the Church. This is the purpose of the Church.

To worship Christ by making disciples of all nations, by going, by baptising, by teaching. There is so much for us to do.

so much for us to accomplish. And sometimes it can feel like there is too much. That it is in fact too great a commission.

How can we ever cope? Let me finish with this. Always remember that the Great Commission is given by the Great Commissioner himself.

It is given by the One who completed his own Great Commission. It is given by the One who does now possess all authority over heaven and earth, who has an all conquering power.

[35 : 05] It is given by the One who will be with you always, wherever you go, to the end of the age. Yes, it is a Great Commission, but you, my friends, you have a far, far greater commission.

Let's praise and cry.