

## *A Kingdom Commission*

Matthew 28:16-20

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Good morning. I want to send greetings from Mission to the World and to say thank you for all the prayers and support that you've given not only to Mission to the World, but particularly to the missionaries that you support. So, thank you. Thank you for that.

If you have your Bibles, I'd invite you to turn to Matthew 28 as we give ear to the reading of God's very own word. Matthew 28:16-20. This is God's very own word, Matthew 28:16-20.

Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them. And when they saw him they worshiped him, 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 of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age." [ESV]

May God add His blessings to the reading of His word. Pray with me, if you will.

Father, please help us by your Holy Spirit to understand these words. Help me by the same Spirit to speak the message you have for us today. We pray in Jesus's name. Amen.

As mentioned earlier, our family had the privilege of serving as missionaries in southeast Asia for about ten years. So, question for you. Who was the most respected king in southeast Asia? I would argue that it was the former king of Thailand. The former king of Thailand was loved and revered by his subjects. He wasn't just a figurehead. He had real influence over the people that he served. In fact, some of you may have remembered a time just a few years ago, there was a lot of civil unrest in Thailand. People were demonstrating on the streets. They weren't sure what was going to happen to the country. But it only took the king of Thailand to stand up before his subjects and to address them. And he would say, "Stop your demonstrations and behave as Thai ought to behave." And at that, the people dropped their signs, picked up their stuff, and went home. Can you imagine that happening here? Never.

But here's the thing, beloved. We also have a king. What's His name? Jesus. And what do you think people say about us who belong to His kingdom? Do they say, His people don't really respect Him very much? Or do they say, at His command they will drop everything and follow in obedience?

Well, this morning we're going to take a look at the words of our King before He ascended into heaven. The great commission passage, a very familiar passage, is actually a resurrection passage, if you remember. And as we look at this great commission mandate from our King, we will see first and foremost, this is a commission of grace. Secondly, it is a commission with authority. And finally, it is the commission for all disciples, all followers of Jesus.

And so, I think the first thing the Lord is telling us this morning is quite simply that we don't deserve to be a part of this kingdom. We don't deserve it. Can you imagine what must've been going on in the minds of those disciples when they heard from Mary Magdalene that early Sunday morning, Jesus is alive. Jesus is risen. Just three days earlier, their Lord was hung on a cross, His body limp. How could it be, then, that Jesus is alive, that He wants to meet them in Galilee?

If you remember your geography, the disciples of the time were in Jerusalem, but Galilee was probably about 60 to 75 miles away. And so, we can imagine these disciples having to travel together from Jerusalem to Galilee, it probably took them about four or five days. Can you imagine what they must've been talking about on the way? And I can think of their minds flashing back to the last time they were all gathered together in the garden of Gethsemane. And I can imagine, perhaps, echoing in their ears

the words of their Lord, "You can't even keep watch and pray with me for one hour?" "Rise, behold, my betrayer is at hand." And do you remember the scene when the angry mob came with clubs and spears and swords to take Jesus. All of His disciples, what did they do? They abandoned Him. They fled. They left. Certainly, Peter must have remembered how the rooster crowed and Jesus turned and looked at him at the courtyard of the high priest.

And so, I can imagine these disciples walking to the place where they would meet Jesus filled with conflicting emotions not only wonder in awe that maybe Jesus is really alive but also fear and shame and guilt that they would have to face the one that they abandoned, they denied.

It was when I was about ten years old, my older brother and I and a neighborhood were playing at a nearby park. And as we were playing there minding our own business, there were these older neighborhood bullies. And they were pretty far away from us at the time, but they started teasing us, yelling at us, I think in fact trying to throw water balloons at us. But you know, as rascally ten-year-old boys, we yelled back not expecting what would happen. They started chasing after us. And we all had our bikes there at the time, and so we hopped on our bikes as we saw them coming and we pedaled as fast as we could back home back where it was safe. It was just a couple blocks away.

And of course, I was the first back. My heart was pounding, and I remember screaming and yelling. And then my friend came next to me, and we turned, and we looked. About a block away was my brother. The chain had fallen off his bike. And sure enough, those older bullies came, and they took a couple of cheap shots and took off. There he was, angry, humiliated, crying, weeping. He picked up his bike. He walked it over to where we were. And then he turned to me and he slugged me in the stomach. He said, where were you? Didn't you hear me cry for help? After the incident, we asked our dad to teach us taekwondo. It only lasted a couple weeks.

You see, we should expect Jesus to come to His disciples on that mountain and to slug them, right? Say, where were you? But He doesn't. He doesn't rebuke them. He doesn't reject them. He doesn't mention any of their failures, any of their sins. In fact, when He's standing before them and some of them are doubting, He doesn't mention even that fact. When He goes and He meets Mary Magdalene, He tells her, "Go and tell my brothers to meet me in Galilee." He still considers them His brothers, even Peter.

This is a picture, beloved, of God's incredible grace and His mercy. What did they deserve? Well, what they deserved is to be abandoned. What they deserved is to be denied before the Father. What they deserved is to be excluded from the kingdom. But instead of rebuke, what does Jesus do? He finds, He pursues them, He forgives them. He enlists them into the kingdom service that He began. And so, we have here right at the beginning of this great commission mandate a picture of God's amazing grace, and we ask ourselves, who are these disciples? They are us. We're just like them, hesitant, doubtful, full of fears, perhaps even this morning full of shame, full of guilt.

Now, I don't know about you, but when someone that I have offended that I actually respect overlooks my offense against him and shows me grace, I can't help but respect that person even more. And when He demonstrates to me that our relationship is so secure and that there's no strings attached for his love for me, I can't help but love Him even more. And when I am convinced that He sees me for who I am with all of my brokenness and sin and cowardice and insecurities and fears and still loves me, I can't help but be passionate for what He is passionate for.

Where does passion for missions come from? It comes from a deep passion for our King, for our Lord who has given His life for us. You see, this isn't guilt-trip motivation for missions, but that which springs from a sincere love and affection and desire to please our King. The more that we dwell upon God's grace for us, the more fuel that we add to missions, fire in our hearts. And so, yes, we do not deserve to be a part of this great commission work. And yet, He calls us by His grace.

The second thing I believe the Lord is telling us this morning is that we don't have to be afraid. We don't have to be afraid to engage in this mission. Why? Because the one who sends us, Jesus our King, has

been given all authority both in heaven and on earth. And so, when we go, we go with His authority. But my fear, beloved, quite honestly is that we don't really believe this. We don't believe that we send, that we support, and that we go with the authority of Christ.

You know, when I talk to people about missions, they tend to fall into one of two extremes. The first is just what I've described, utter fear and anxiety. We think perhaps how ill equipped we are to enter into a discipleship relationship with someone, that to share our faith with someone, to even begin praying whether God is calling us to go overseas and serve as His ambassadors. Even for those who are called to give, they are often hesitant to give beyond what's comfortable. Do we believe that the one who calls us to this task has been given all authority both in heaven and on earth, and that we send and support and go with that authority?

Well, if utter fear and anxiety is one extreme, what would the other extreme be? Overconfidence, perhaps pride in our own authority. Sometimes, we think because we are educated, we are wealthy because we're from the west that somehow the world has to listen to us. And so, we go about this work that God has called us to in our own strength, in our own confidence. Beloved, that is just as dangerous as engaging this with fear and trembling.

When our family first came to the Philippines, it was the first field we served. And I had just finished my Ph. D in New Testament studies. Early on, we had a chance to visit the theological seminary there in Metro Manila in Cavite, and as I came, I was thinking to myself while visiting the campus: these students are so lucky to have someone like me. I have a Ph. D. So, I go to the campus, and I'm thinking about all the preparation. I'm so excited to be there. And I meet some students, and they're very friendly. And then one of them asked me quite innocently, "So, what year in school are you here?" He thought I was a student. I was so offended internally. Of course, as a missionary, you can't show pride. You have to kind of play that off. And so, I said, "You know what? I'm not a student here." He said, "Well, are you going to apply?"

You know, we need to ask ourselves some pretty hard questions, right? What kind of authority are we basing our confidence upon? Is it worldly authority? Is it our education, our money, our power, our influence? Or do we believe that Jesus our King has all authority and that we go about this work that He has called us to with His authority? Only by the authority that is given to us through His Holy Spirit can we actually do anything of lasting value for His kingdom.

You know the promise at the end of the great commission? What does it say? "Behold, I am with you even to the end of the age." Sometimes, I think we imagine a picture of Jesus kind of hovering over us as we go about His work. I don't think that's quite the picture that is painted for us. Rather, it is a promise of His dwelling Holy Spirit in us, equipping us, empowering us through this great task. Do you believe this?

When this understanding of the Spirit filling us drops from our head to our hearts, two things happen simultaneously. We become incredibly confident, we become incredibly humble, both at the same time. It should give us who are doubtful, who are insecure, who are hesitant confidence knowing that Jesus is calling us to a task that cannot fail and giving us a power that has no bounds. At the same time, it reminds us that it is not our authority, our power by which the kingdom of God advances, but it is by His. And so, we need both gospel confidence and gospel humility through the power of the Holy Spirit if His kingdom is going to advance.

So, number one, the Lord is telling us we don't deserve to participate in this mission work, and yet He calls us by His grace. And second, He says we can't do this work by our own authority, but we can by His. And finally, the Lord is telling us this morning that all of us, everyone who is a follower of Jesus, a disciple of Christ needs to be involved in this great commission work, needs to be involved in making more disciples.

As we look at our texts, what are those two main tasks that Jesus associates with making disciples? Number one, baptism. Number two, teaching everything that Jesus commands. Why baptism? Baptism signifies one's entrance into the community of Jesus's disciples. It requires this radical commitment. Today I die and am reborn by the power of the Holy Spirit to live as a follower of Jesus. Keep in mind that this definition of discipleship is not simply something you do after someone believes in Jesus. Oftentimes, in our evangelical church culture, we think that's what discipleship is. And yet, evangelism is very much a part of this whole discipleship task. Leading someone into this relationship with Jesus is part of making disciples.

The second, teaching, why teaching? Well, teaching is the means that Jesus uses to mature and nurture His followers in their faith. Specifically, teaching them to obey everything that Jesus commands including this command to what? Go and make disciples. And so, you see part and parcel, then, of being a disciple is making a disciple.

The truth is we can't make disciples unless we first are disciples. And so, let me ask you this morning, you made that decision to wholeheartedly live for the Lord. And are we committed to a lifetime of learning and growing in the gospel of grace? And maybe you're saying this morning, but we're not ready. We're not equipped to engage in discipleship making. Isn't it the pastor's job to baptize and teach? And of course, God has His ordained servants to carry out these specific functions in the church. But you see, we cannot get away from this simple definition through the great commission to follow this and obey this command to go and make disciples, and that is for His church. And so, every disciple is called to engage in making more disciples, whether that is sending, supporting, or going to the nations.

These four pastors go to a restaurant and they're seated. And the waitress comes over and throws the menus down on the table and says, what do you want? In fact, she is so rude to them, the whole evening meal is ruined. After they pay the bill, the most senior pastor calls her over. He wants to have a word with her. He looks her right in the eye and he says to her, it seems like you've had a really hard day. And he hands her a hundred-dollar bill. She is so moved by this act of kindness and generosity, she starts to weep, she starts to cry, she starts to pour out all of her troubles and all of her problems. And right there, the pastor shares with her the gospel. And there she receives Jesus as her Lord, as her Savior, as her King. Well, out in the parking lot, the most senior pastor turns to his colleagues and he tells them, and now I want each of you to give me \$25. You see, every one of us can be involved in making disciples, some leading people to this radical commitment, and others – well, you know.

But of course, what are these teachings of our Lord? They're gospel teachings, are they not? And so, we don't have to teach our disciples that somehow that have to have these perfect moral lives. What is discipleship? It's simply showing another person how to apply the gospel to all the areas of our life, to our marriage, to how we raise our children, to our work, to how we think about ourselves and our role in society. And so, when the center of discipleship is on the gospel, the focus is not on us, but on Jesus. We don't have to pretend to be something we're not.

In fact, what do we tell those we seek to engage? We tell them, we're just as messed up as you and we need this gospel that we're proclaiming to you just as much as we are offering it to you. We need to come before our God. We need to confess our sins, our anxieties, our failures, our sins. And as someone has said, what we're doing is the picture of one beggar showing another beggar where to find food.

Now, certainly we can be involved in making disciples here, Columbia, in Maryland, in this area. Certainly, different nations have come. But the Lord is still calling His church to go, to go to other nations, to go to other places in order to fulfill His purposes, His redemptive plans for His creation. And so, Jesus, risen from the grave, exalted to the highest place, our reigning King, He calls us to carry forth His message of the kingdom to the ends of the earth.

This task is not an option for us. It's not something we do if we have extra time. It's included, in fact, in the very definition of what it means to be a follower of Jesus. It helps define our purpose in life, quite honestly. So, let me ask you this morning, beloved, do we respect our King? Our King has set us free

from the burdens and the shackle of the shame that we hold and the guilt that we have and the fears. He has set us free. And so, let us respect our King, beloved. And may His vision for the nations be our vision as well. Amen. Let's pray.

O Father, we delight in the grace that you lavishly pour upon us. We delight in the fact that we can call you Father and be royalty and acknowledge you as King with authority. Lord Jesus, help us to live and soak deeply in this grace that we would indeed add more fuel to missions, fire in our hearts. Be please with us, O Lord, your servants. And help us, Father, to carry forth the mission that you have called us to. We pray through the powerful, mighty, matchless name of Jesus, our King. Amen.