

Commissional Ministry

Matthew 28:16-20¹

Russ Kennedy

We are in the middle of a lot of things. We are in the middle of financial reversals, political transition, cultural war and theological downgrade. In the midst of all this mess, we are also in the middle of something grand and great and glorious. We are in the middle of the stream of redemptive history – of the great mission that God is on to call a redeemed people out of every tongue, tribe, nation and people group to glorify Himself through magnifying Christ. That is what we are all about.

We are a Commissional Church. This is our identity from Christ. We are a people gathered as a community, in exile from our homeland yet living as ambassadors and witnesses in a hostile land among unholy people.

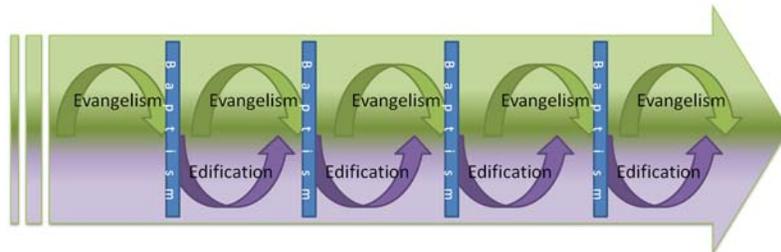
We are becoming a Commissional Church. This is our transformation in ministry. We are going to become who we are. We do this as believers individually - transformation is the living out the new person we have already become. So we do this as a church – we begin living out the commissional community God has told us we really are.

We are together here as a missional community fulfilling our commissional mandate. That is, we are making disciples of all nations by evangelizing the lost and edifying the saved.

This is not a circle.



It is an arrow.



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This is who we are. Now we will become who God says we are.

By God's Grace and through His Word
we will cultivate in the hearts of God's people
a passion for the supremacy
of the Lord Jesus Christ
magnified in love for Him
manifested in love for one another
and *multiplied by love for the lost.*

In the fall of 2009 we began this journey of designing, developing and doing what it means to be a *Commissional Community* a church on mission. This is our term we coined here. And yes others have begun using it as well. Over these last 4 years we have thought, taught and teamed to take the seeds that were sown and to grow and cultivate them into a full flower. It has been hard and happy work.

During September and October we will be presenting in our work in the Word how we do ministry at the Chapel. Hopefully you will see the DNA of a Commission Church embedded everywhere. The aim of this series is to exposit, expose and explain how we are and will wisely work out the will of God for a church to make disciples. We exist to exalt God, to edify the saints and to evangelize the lost. Being a commission, disciple making church means that we are working to fulfill the great commission and the New Testament's implementation of it in our ministries.

May God be pleased as we, with the Word He has given us and wisdom He has imparted, seek to make disciples through the ministry of the Chapel.

I want to take up once again a familiar, but foundational text for our church. Steve Best highlighted the glory of God and the work of the gospel from this text. I commend that message to you. It is available on our site at Sermon Audio. There is an important function in preaching to remind us of what we already know so that our believing God in an obeying way is reinforced. So much of what we prize, how we talk, what we pursue, how we serve is built on and shaped by the foundations that are this text.

¹⁹Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age."

Illustration military operates best when there is a mission. A defined objective, proper equipment, leadership support, and a defined ending. **This is true of mission in the church as well.**

Since the church exists for one purpose, that is to bring glorious worship to God, what is the church's task today?

The People of our King

(v. 16-17)

¹⁶Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them. ¹⁷And when they saw him they worshiped him, but some doubted.

Their Simple Obedience

(v. 16)

This scene is part of the topography of Matthew. Several important events take place on mountains.

Jesus is taken to a mountain to be tempted to have the kingdoms of this world now (4:8)

Jesus teaches the transformed nature of the kingdom from a mountain (5:1).

Jesus goes up into a mountain to pray (14:23).

Jesus demonstrates his power to heal so that God is glorified (15:29).

Jesus meets with Moses and Elijah and is transfigured on a mountain (17:1-10).

Jesus gives the great commission and ascends from a mountain (28:16).

So this place is going to have kingdom significance. It will be the final mountain from which the Kingdom will be launched into its people entrusted, Word shaped Spirit empowered expansion.

This is the place he appointed and directed His disciples to come to. They would know this place to be a significant meeting place. We don't know for certain if this is the same mountain in Galilee spoken of several times in Matthew. From the very first hours on resurrection morning, the disciples have been sent to meet with Jesus. For forty days he has met with them and taught them. Now, an initial simple obedience brings them to an assignment and a farewell.

Their Mixed Response

The disciples are still struggling as is evident in their mixed response. When they see the Lord, they worship Him. Verse 9-10 tells us that they did the same thing, ⁹ And behold, Jesus met them and said, "Greetings!" And they came up and took hold of his feet and worshiped him. ¹⁰ Then Jesus said to them, "Do not be afraid; go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee, and there they will see me." He is the risen Lord. He is the King. From the upper room to this is a mountain, there was something about Him that invoked their worship.

But some doubted. Think about that for a moment. Here are the handpicked, faithful eleven. They have seen the resurrected Lord. They have now come to meet Him at the familiar mountain. What is there to doubt? Why does Matthew say this here? What is he telling the church? What is he intending for us?

In verses 9-10 and verses 17, they worship the Lord. But they were fearful and now doubting. Matthew is pointing us to two of the great hurdles to carrying out the mission of the Lord. Fear and doubt. What was the Lord's solution to their fear and doubt? First, it is His Word. He speaks. He commands. Fear and doubt are overcome by hearing the Word of God. They will also be overcome by the giving of the Spirit. But this is not Mat-

thew's focus. For Matthew, the King is the fulfillment of the Scripture. The King gives us His authoritative interpretation of the Scripture. The King gives His own words to become Scripture. The King will save, transform, govern and send His people by the Word.

The Preeminence of our King

(v.18)

Jesus now speaks His Word announcing His preeminence.

¹⁸And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.

Its Declaration

Jesus declares His all encompassing sovereignty. In the expression. "All authority given," He is announcing His right to command. Jesus' authority is not small nor narrow. He does not just have authority over spiritual matters. But most important here, He is not just one among many authorities. He has been given all authority. Since the cross and resurrection, all rights to rule and reign have been given to Jesus alone. There may be many who aspire to His place. But He has no real competitors. He does not share His place with others. He is the absolute and total potentate. Now we know that He will delegate that authority to others. But even in the delegation is an exhibition of His privilege and power.

Jesus declares is al encompassing scope. His authority is in heaven and earth. So there is no one not under His authority. There is no place that He does not rule. There is no one that He does not rule over. So the mission we have is *not* to extend the authority of Jesus. Our responsibility is to call people to believe and to bow *to the One who is the King*. This means that all who do not bow to Jesus are living in functional rebellion. Whether they know it or not, they are not obeying the King who is over them.

His disciples, while at times fearful and doubting, are here because He commands. These eleven (plus one later) will form the core of the commissional band. They gather at the feet of the King. They worship Him. They hear His Word. They believe that He is sovereign over all and everywhere. They submit to their King. When they receive His Spirit, they will go.

Its Implications

He is ruling and reigning over His people. We are now in the Kingdom of Christ.

Entrance into the kingdom involves submission to the King. It is not as much a matter of us accepting Him as His accepting us. When we are accepted in the beloved (Ephesians 1:6 & Romans 15:7) then we receive Him (John 1:12-13) in the new birth.

He has, once and for all, received all the authority so that He is superimently elevated above all creation.



therefore: Since the King is preeminent, there are ...

- ❖ Orders to us - we must go
- ❖ Orders to nations - they must repent
- ❖ Glory to Christ - let all the nations be glad

The Program of our King

(v.19-20a)

¹⁹Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you.

That kingdom in this age is a spiritual one whose expansion is the sweeping of the elect into the kingdom by the discipling of the nations.

Its Authoritative Connection

First, notice the “therefore”. What is the “since” that this is a “therefore” for? Since _____ therefore _____.

Is this saying, “Since I have this all encompassing authority to command, then go make disciples...”?

Is this saying, “Since I have this all encompassing authority as King, the go make [subjects] disciples...”?

In the book of Matthew I believe it is the second. Yes, He has the authority over the disciples. But the point here is that disciple making is going to be about making people subjects and followers of Christ. Since He has all authority everywhere, go and bring people under that authority.

I think this is a missing part of modern evangelism. When I talk to people about Jesus, I am talking about my King. I am His subject, His follower. I am declaring the good news that the victory has been won. The true King has been ascended. The way to be redeemed, reconciled and restored to the King’s graces has been provided. And at no cost to you. But you must believe this is true. You must bow to the King, not just in an initial act but as a growing habit of life. And this is not just invitation; it is a command from the high king.

Its Central Imperative

There is a central, overarching command.

Go and make disciples of all nations...

While “go” in English sounds like a command, it actually is not. It could be translated, “Having gone, do this” or “Wherever you are carried to and go, do this...” It is actually more stunning because it anticipates a historical reality. Wherever God’s people end up, make disciples. There is very clear sense of an outward movement by God’s people that comes as God’s providential wave sweeps them along. So I say to you, wherever God has moved you and planted you, there do your part to make disciples of people around you. This is part of the thrust of Dan’s classes in Bible Education.

The command is to make disciples of all people groups. The commission is to cause people to become devoted learners and followers of the Lord, to whom they have bowed. When Matthew writes this and what Matthew writes here was clearly understood. Everything that was done as the disciples were going, was to make others followers of Jesus just as they were.

So, how do we know that we are truly commissional? When, where we are and wherever we go because of the providence of God, we are seeing people become devoted learners and followers of Jesus. Everything that we do at the Chapel is to this aim. We want you to become disciples. We want you to become devoted learners and followers of the Lord. And we want you involved in making others disciples as well.

The New Testament will flesh out for us what that looks like. But Jesus frames and focuses the implementation in what He says next.

Its Ongoing Tasks

That command is carried out *through* two important tasks.

...baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,

²⁰teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you.

Both of these are integral to making disciples. They stand out here because they are present active participles. So it at its simplest looks like this.



It could also be represented like this.



Baptizing them

The first ongoing task for disciples is to make a public confession of faith and union with Christ and the church through the ordinance of baptism. So this is very interesting. A commissional, disciple-making church will require baptism of all who claim to believe and bow to Jesus. This is the first step in making disciples.

Now, there is a lot that precedes this. We call it evangelism. I am struck by the fact that while baptizing and teaching are commanded, evangelizing is not. At least not in this text. Now, we know that telling the people the gospel so that they believe the gospel and bow to God are what bring people to make a public profession. So evangelism must take place. It is the ministry that is done that brings people to the point of becoming a disciple. Without it, there are not disciples.

This means that everything we do in evangelism should prepare a person to be ready to be discipled. They should understand that they must believe God in an obeying way. They must understand that they have to confess that Jesus is Lord, not just with their lips but also with their lives. So our ministries of evangelism think like this. Dan's teaching on and training in evangelism is designed to put people on a discipleship path. It is not designed to elicit a decision. It is designed to birth a disciple.

How do we know that we are to tell them the truth in evangelism? I see this in the formula given here. Yes we pronounce this in baptism as a part of the ritual. We understand that baptism is the outward act that pictures the inward reality. We do in water what God has already done in our soul. But the act of baptism is loaded with gospel truth. For baptism to be a meaningful act for the new disciple and for the community of disciples, *they have to have a Biblical understanding of the gospel.*

Essential for baptism is a confession of the death, burial and resurrection of Christ. When you look at the New Testament evangelistic preaching in Acts, the trajectory through the Old Testament that lands on Christ, His cross and resurrection is followed. The end point of those sermons is a declaration that Jesus is both savior and sovereign. It then culminates in a command, a call to repent, to turn from the old and to turn to the new through the death and resurrection of Jesus. So, when a person repents and believes, the first act of obedience is to be immersed in the gospel in a public way. This is why we say in baptism, the Romans 6 application of the gospel to a person: buried in the likeness of His death and raised to *walk in newness of life*. The initial act of making a disciple is to call for an act of obedience that outwardly displays what the gospel has inwardly done.

Essential to the gospel is a confession of the truth that there is One God, thus a singular Name. And, there are three persons of the One God; that is, the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. A Biblically Commissional church will baptize only those who confess the Trinity. I know there is much debate about this. However, for a Jew to be saved, they had to acknowledge that there was God the Father, and God the Son and that Jesus is God the Son. We believe and teach that is so for all the people groups including Muslims.

So, our commissional ministries will bring sinners to the point of publicly professing the gospel through an act of faith and obedience that initiates the life of gospel oriented, obeying discipleship.

Teaching them

The second on-going task of a commissional community is making disciples through teaching them to observe all that the Scriptures require.

Commissional ministries rely on teaching to do what God purposes.

The Word of God will do the work of God. Where the Word is working the Spirit will be working. So we will rely on the Word so that God will accomplish what He has designed.

Commissional ministries teach to instill a disciple's faith in God.

Without instruction in the Word of God, the disciple of Jesus does not know what to believe. So their faith will either be informed by the world or by those who give false teaching. So will teach you God's Word so that you walk in faith, believing God in an obeying way.

Commissional ministries teach to model and grow a disciple's love.

Speaking the truth in love teaches the disciple to use truth to grow love. The Word taught with love will help people to grow in love for God and love for others. After all, Paul said, "nothing matters but faith working in love." (Galatians 5:6)

Commissional ministries teach for a disciple to walk in the will and wisdom of God.

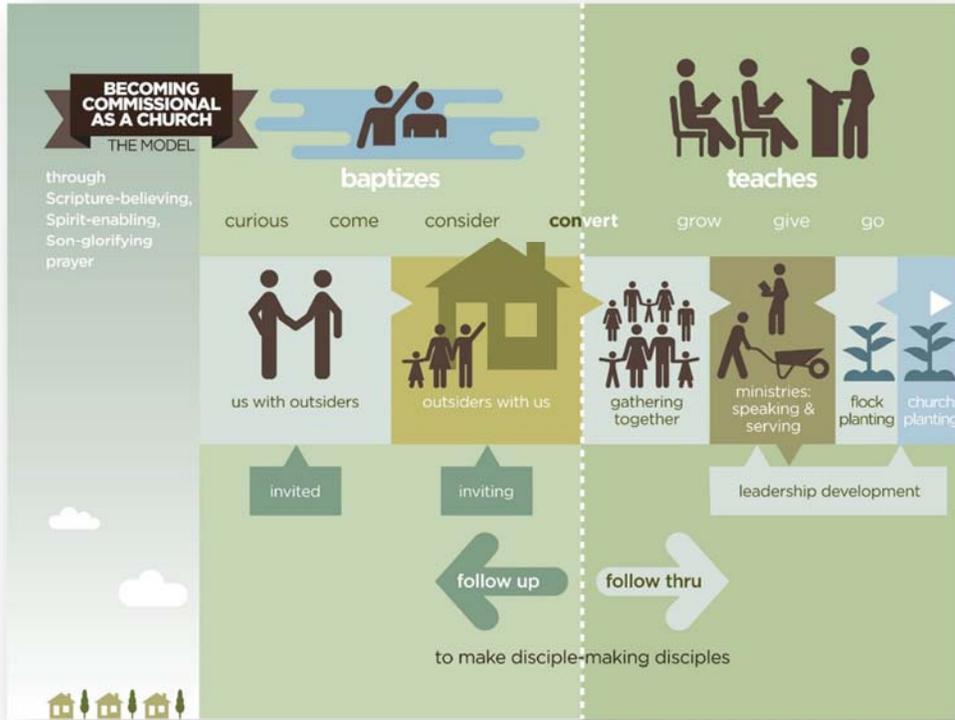
Biblical teaching distinguishes between the will of God and the wisdom from God. So it will not become its own law system. It will be a means of grace.

Commissional ministries teach to equip disciples for the use of their gifts.

Biblical teaching is both telling and showing. It models its message. So Jesus uses an important word here, "to observe". Proper teaching helps disciples to know how to obey and how work. We equip people for living and for serving.

There are many ways in which teaching can take place. It is not just when one person stands up in front of a group and "teaches". Teaching can take place in evangelism, in preaching, in counseling, in one-anothering, in education and in just casual conversation.

We represent our wisdom application of this core commissional command this way.



We long to see this kind of commissional ministry here in our neighborhoods and in all the nations.

The Promise of our King

(v.20b)

And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.

Attention

It is important to the mission itself. Without this promise, we have will have no purpose and no power. He is physically leaving. But He will send His Spirit who will indwell us individually and corporately. The Spirit in us will be Jesus's presence with us.

Explanation

He is present in the Kingdom till the end of this age. The King will ascend to His throne. But that does not mean He is absent. He is present. He has redeemed and will rule over His people. He is calling His elect into union and communion with Him. His people may leave in His blessing, walking with Him and serving Him. He will be gathering and growing His people until the end of the age. Like Abraham, everywhere God's people go and people are truly converted, God's Kingdom is expanding. Everywhere God's people are called out and being gathering, they grow into personal and corporate maturity through teaching. Through the presence of the Word among God's people, Jesus us present with them as well.

Reflect and Respond

- The mission of the church is related to Christ as King. Evangelism is a Kingdom issue. Therefore we must preach the gospel in such a way that men and women are brought to the Lord of the Universe who through His Son has provided the only way of reconciliation.
- Evangelism is not merely people *making a decision for Christ* but *making people disciples of Christ*. It is not merely an initial profession, but a profession which begins a process. Walking through the narrow gate does put us on a narrow road.
- The ministries of a Commission Church will make disciples. Some ministries will focus more on evangelism and some on edification. I want to repeat this again: Being commissional is not just about reaching the lost. It is about making disciples. Disciple making begins with a kind of evangelism that brings people to making a public profession of faith through baptism. Then disciple making continues with teaching and training believers in the Word. The aim is unity in faith, maturity in walk and serving in ministry.
- Commission ministry is framed and fueled by this amazing text.

We have the risen Lord who summons His disciples.

We have disciples, some of whom worship and some of whom hesitate.

We have the King who has been granted all authority in heaven in earth. There, on that mountain, the first outpost of the kingdom of God is established.

We have a charge, a command, a commission given. Make disciples of all the people groups. Making disciples expands the kingdom.

We have the means to do it: evangelizing culminating in baptism and edification aimed at mature obedience to Christ.

We have a covenant, a promise that fuels our motivation. Where the gospel is preached and lived, where people believe and bow, the King is present, all the way until the end of the age.

May we rejoice together as we serve our King as a commission gathered people.