

The Responsibilities of the Church: Evangelism, Part 2

Selected Scriptures

90-151

As we started this morning we return to Matthew Chapter 28 tonight to discuss this very important function of the church that is at the heart of the mission of the church and that is to proclaim the gospel to those that are without the Lord Jesus Christ. And just as we said this morning is God's ordained mission for his people. A little bit of perspective on that, if you study the Old Testament you will note very clearly as you begin to see God's plan unfold with the nation Israel that Israel was never called by God as an end in itself. Israel was called by God to be a witness nation. They were to show forth the praise of his glory. In fact, in I Chronicles 16:23-24 the Scripture says, "Sing unto the Lord all the earth, show forth day to day his salvation. Declare his glory among the nations, his marvelous works among all peoples." And that was the particular calling of the people of Israel.

In the midst of a pagan world where there were many gods was Israel who believed in and worshipped the one true God. And they were to proclaim him to the nations of the world. They developed nationalistic pride, as you know. They developed reluctance to do that. They even developed animosity toward the nations they were supposed to reach and that is never clearer indicated in Scripture than in the experience of Jonah, who when called by God to go and preach the truth to Nineveh turned his back on the will of God and went in the opposite direction because he had no interest in seeing Gentiles come to know the true God. They became very possessive, very nationalistic, even very racist and turned away from the intended purpose from which God had called them.

And that was not to be the end, but not to be the bucket, as it were, but to be the channel through which the truth of God would flow to the world. Eventually God set Israel aside. Their unbelief, and their unwillingness to do the work of God and to be a witness nation to the world was finally reaching its culmination at the time of Christ and reached its very apex when they executed their own Messiah at the hands of the Romans and at that point the Lord carved out a new people called the church, that new people made up of Jew and Gentile is now God's witness nation to the world.

It has always been God's desire to reach the world with the message of forgiveness, forgiveness of sin and reconciliation with God, the message of eternal life. It has always been his desire to reach the world with that message because God is not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance because God, our Savior, will have all men to be saved. He is unfolding his redemptive purpose and when Israel failed to do that God set them aside in favor of the church. The wonderful teaching of Scripture is, however, that God made promises to Israel that are inviolable and must be fulfilled so as Romans 11 says in particular, there will come a time when Israel will be saved, grafted back into the stock of blessing, will become a witness nation to the world. In fact, in the time of tribulation there will be 12,000 from every tribe in Israel making up the 144,000 witnesses that spread the gospel across the world at the end of the tribulation time and before the return of Jesus to set up his kingdom.

So had, from the beginning, ordained a witness people through whom the truth about himself could be proclaimed to the world. As I said, the sad reality is that Israel failed to do that and the Lord has carved out his church. The church, of course, is a combination of success and failure in this enterprise, but nonetheless God is working his will through his redeemed people now called the church.

Now as we come to Matthew Chapter 28 we really get a defined statement about this commission for the church. As God, in the Old Testament, clearly defined for Israel what he expected them to do, to be his witness nation, to carry the message concerning the truth of himself to the world, they were to fear the Lord, Deuteronomy says, they were to serve the Lord, they were to cling to the Lord, they were to praise the Lord who had done great and awesome things and they were to show their love for the alien and the stranger and they were to thereby to reach out and proclaim the true God to them. And here we have the commission that comes to the church in Matthew 28. I'll read it to you, the last three verses: "Jesus came up and spoke to them saying, 'All authority has been given to me in heaven and on earth, go therefore, and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you and lo I am with you always even to the end of the age.'" Here then in no uncertain terms is our commission.

And as we said this morning the key to this is in verse 19 where it says, "Make disciples." In fact, the other verbs you don't necessarily know that from the English translation, but the other verbs that are in verse 19 are all participles and as you may remember in your English classes long ago participles are verb forms, which modify the main verb. And the main verb here is make disciples. As we said this morning that is the purpose of the church, that is the mission that we have in the world. All other things work toward that goal.

For you that might not have been here this morning, we talked about the fact that the mission of the church is not fellowship, the mission of the church is not teaching and preaching, the mission of the church is not praise and worship, those are all functions of the church, which strengthen it and motivate it and direct it toward the mission of the church, which is to make disciples of all nations, all people, all races, all tribes, all ethnic groups across the face of the earth. And as we also said this morning that's the only reason we're here because every other function of the church would be better accomplished in heaven, better fellowship, better knowledge of the truth, better worship in heaven. But there's a compelling reason why we're here as we saw in II Corinthians 5, and that is because we've been given the ministry of reconciliation.

So when anybody suggests to you that you have some other function in this world beside that you need to remind them that the reason you're here in this world, the reason the Lord didn't save you and take you out is so that you might be an instrument by which God can reconcile others to himself.

And I remind you, again, of how important it is to understand that God is unfolding a redeeming purpose, a redeeming purpose. From the beginning to the end of human history the whole plan is to bring to heaven a redeemed humanity, forgiven of sin and saved by the manifestation of God's great grace, particularly in the sacrifice of his Son Jesus Christ, and that unfolding plan is the reason for human history, in order that God manifest his grace in the saving of sinners.

In John 4, that redemptive enterprise is defined in this way: the Father seeks true worshippers who will worship him in spirit and in truth. So the Father through redemptive history is seeking those who will come to him and be true worshippers. When the Son came into the world revealing the Father, Luke writes, that the Son is come to seek and to save that which was lost. The Spirit will be sent Jesus said in John 16, to convict the world of sin and to convict the world of righteousness, and to convict the world of judgment in order that they might come to the knowledge of the truth. The Father has a saving purpose, the Son has a saving purpose and the Spirit has a saving purpose. That's, by the way, a very interesting passage in John 16 that when it says he will convict the world of sin the sin is singular and then it goes on to define it because they believe not on Me. The damning sin, the sin that catapults people into hell is the sin of unbelief.

While it is true that all who are sinners, by virtue of their depravity in sin, deserve eternal hell, what ultimately sends sinners there is a rejection of Jesus Christ, not believing in him. So the Spirit comes to convict of sin, the sin of not believing in Christ. The Spirit also comes to convict of righteousness and that is to convict of a true righteousness, the righteousness of Christ, which is accepted by God not self-righteousness. And then the Spirit comes to convict of judgment and what that means is a true judgment because the judgment of man is faulty. Man's understanding of his sin is faulty, his understanding of righteousness is faulty, his understanding or his judgment or his discernment is faulty and the good illustration, the best illustration of that is that they crucified the Lord of Glory. That'll show you how discerning sinful man is.

So the Spirit comes to give the true understanding of sin, the true understanding of righteousness, the true understanding of discernment or judgment so that man can be saved. So whether you're talking about the Father, whether you're talking about the Son, or whether you're talking about the Spirit, they're all engaged in the saving enterprise. And furthermore, as we saw this morning, in Acts 1:8, the Scripture tells us that, "When the Holy Spirit comes we will be witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and the uttermost part of the earth.

So the Holy Spirit comes, dwells within every believer to enable believers to be effective witnesses to the truth of the transforming power of Jesus Christ. So that just sums up the whole of the Trinitarian operation of which we are a part by virtue of the power of the Spirit and the salvation that God has granted to us in Christ. We then carry on the work that Jesus began. In fact, in Acts 1:1, it says that, "The first account I composed, Theophilus, that's the book of Luke, about all that Jesus began to do. Jesus began the ministry of reconciliation; he began calling sinners to God, and told them that he was the source of that reconciliation as the Son of God and Messiah. He passes that on to us. And we do that according to Acts 1, until he comes back.

You remember after Jesus said that the Spirit would come, he also said the same Jesus that was taken up from you shall so come in like manner as you've seen him go. From the time of the commission and the coming of the Spirit until the return of Christ, we are engaged in this great enterprise of making disciples. That is bringing people to the knowledge of Christ and building them up in the truth and in fellowship and in praise so that they can be effective in reproducing themselves. That is the purpose of the church.

Now this morning I gave you the first two points in this text that really are elements that are essential if we're going to fulfill this purpose. The first one is availability and we noted in verse 16 how that Jesus had told everybody to gather at a certain time and a certain place in Galilee and over 500 people showed up and they were the ones who were commissioned by the Lord to this great

enterprise. And I simply used that narrative to remind you that being in the right place at the right time under the proper instruction from the word of God, from the mouth of Jesus is essential to having the instruction to fulfill the duty that the Lord has given to us.

This expresses the willing heart. They were there. They wanted to see the risen Lord. They wanted to hear from the risen Lord and so they were there. The Bible says much about that. I wish we had time tonight, but we don't, to develop the whole concept of a willing heart. Sometime you take your concordance and look up the word willing and just track through the Old and New Testaments and study the willing heart and what a premium God puts on that kind of obedience. Not reluctant obedience, not a resistant obedience but that which rises from the willing heart. The people of God willing to go forth and bear the message of God, in our case, the message of Jesus Christ no matter what may be the price. That is the willing heart.

You find the willing heart marked out, for example, in II Corinthians 8. You remember we studied the Macedonians and they were the example of the giving and the giving that's supposed to be done for the advance of the kingdom is to be done with a willing heart. It simply means an eagerness from the inside without reluctance. In fact, in I Timothy 6:18, it says those people who are rich should be ready to do good, rich in good works, generous, eager to share. That again is the willing heart that you find all through Scripture.

Now, that brings us to a review briefly of the second point and that is worship. We noted in verse 17 that the people who were all up there waiting for Jesus and there were the eleven and the women, as we pointed out this morning from other texts and the 500 plus as I Corinthians 15 notes, and they were all there and it says in verse 17, "When they saw him they worshipped him." And I reminded you again this morning, and I will say it briefly tonight that this is at the heart of effective ministry. When you ask what drives a person, what motivates a person, the bottom line motivation for all of us as Christians is the glory of the Lord and if that is the consuming thing in our lives, if that is the driving thing, if that is the compelling desire then we will make whatever sacrifices that are necessary to honor and glorify him.

I'm so glad that it was many many years ago early on in my ministry here, in fact in the first few years if not the first year in being here that the Lord unfolded to me an understanding of this great motivation and this overarching theme of the Bible, namely the glory of God. And put it in my heart even in those early years that the reason for living was that God might be glorified, that Christ might be exalted and once that motivation captivates your heart then no sacrifice is too great in order that he might be glorified and honored. And your whole heart and your whole mind are set on adoring praise and worship toward him and that translates into doing what you know will bring him the greatest glory and the greatest pleasure.

David, the Psalmist said in Psalm 16:8, "I have set the Lord always before me, therefore my heart is glad." True joy comes when you focus on the Lord and he is the reason for everything that you do. And if you are not motivated it is not a technique issue, it is not a lack of instruction, it is not because you are not sort of redirected into other extraneous things, at the heart of an unwillingness to share the truth of the gospel is an indifference to the glory of Christ. It is to place your own enterprises before his, which is really a love issue, an adoration issue more than anything else.

That brings us to number three in our little outline as we march through the elements that make for effective fulfillment of the great commission. And the third one fits right in with the second one and it

is submission, submission. Verse 18, and it's implied here by what Jesus says. Jesus came up and spoke to them saying, "All authority has been given to me in heaven and on earth." Now that is a preliminary statement that sort of sets the ground for what he's going to say in the next verse. He's going to give a very straightforward demand command in verse 19 and 20 and in order to establish the urgency of that command and the authority of that command in verse 18 he says he has all authority to give it. He is calling his people at this point to a submission to his authority in their lives.

I guess this is something that goes all the way through the Scripture and I just point it out to you. We serve the Lord out of love and adoration and worship and a longing for his glory. We definitely are motivated by that. But in the midst of our weakness and vacillation it's always very important to remember that when our passion grows dim we are still under command. We would like to think that we could serve the Lord purely out of love and purely out of devotion and adoration and praise and that that would be the driving motive all our lives, but the fact of the matter is our flesh gets in the way, the Spirit is willing the flesh is weak as the comment was given regarding the disciples and their inability to fulfill the will of Christ. And so there's going to be times in our life when we have to remember that not only is this something we should be compelled from the inside to do because of our love for Christ, but it is something we've been compelled from the outside to do namely by the authority of the Lord himself. We are under orders. We dare not breach those orders.

So as we come to verse 18 we are reminded again of the authority with which the Lord spoke. In fact, that's a good place to sort of sweep all the way back to the beginning of Matthew's gospel. If you go all the way back to the beginning you'll remember that in Chapter 1, the whole gospel begins with a genealogy. It begins, "The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham", and then it goes from there. That genealogy is there to establish one thing and that is to establish the royal lineage of David. To establish that David's lineage march down through history and came to rest in the person of Jesus Christ, that he is royal blood, that he has the blood of David in his veins in order that it might be established that he is indeed the King promised in David's line.

And so authority is brought to bear on the reader at the very outset of the Book of Matthew. You may be dealing with a baby in a manger but you are dealing with royalty. And that is further established by Matthew in a number of ways, first of all by the visitors that come to visit the Lord Jesus, and namely the, what we call, the wise men, the men who were the astronomers from the East, who were the royal king makers in the Chaldean empire. They followed his star, a supernatural leading from God, the star comes and rests over the place where the child is and they come to worship him. And Matthew gives us that whole account to establish again that you're dealing with royalty here and even the world of Persia, the world of the Chaldeans recognized it.

And then he gives us the tragic story of Herod who say in this birth a rival and wanting, of course to maintain his authority, and being frightened even about a baby who would have to grow up before he would be a rival, so paranoid was Herod that he set out to massacre every child in that region under two years of age, and that is another way of Matthew telling us everybody knew we were dealing with royalty here. The lineage, the wise men, the response of Herod, this was a royal birth. And with royal birth and royal bearing comes authority. Here is the king and everybody in the ancient world knew that a king was the one who was in charge.

Now we come to the end of the gospel of Matthew and we're right back where we started with an affirmation of the authoritative character of the Lord Jesus Christ. He possesses complete and absolute sovereign authority. He says it here, "All authority has been given to me." That word all

probably ought to be underlined because it is somewhat of note that it appears here at the end of Matthew's gospel. Let me tell you why. The range of Jesus' authority, as you study the gospel of Matthew, the range of Jesus' authority keeps expanding. Early you remember when he preached his first great sermon called the Sermon of the Mount in Chapters 5 to 7, at the end of that sermon you remember the comment of the people that he spoke as one having what? Authority! So early on he had authority and they defined what kind of authority. They said he spoke as one having authority and not as the scribes and Pharisees.

So the first thing was his authority was greater than the other official teachers in Israel. Then it is also true in the gospel of Matthew, as it begins to unfold, that he displayed authority over disease. That is to say he had authority over the created order. He had authority over the natural world to miraculously reverse natural phenomena. And beyond that, you see that begin to unfold in Chapter 4 verse 23, etc, etc. It is also true that early on in his ministry he demonstrated authority over demons. So he not only had authority over the natural world, but he had authority over the supernatural world. He had more authority than the official religious leaders of Israel, he had authority that extended over the created order and he had authority over the world of darkness, over the Spiritual supernatural world. Both of demons and Satan and holy angels as well, because he said if he wanted to he could call to his rescue a legion of angels at any time.

And then his authority expands into another dimension as it is indicated in the gospel of Matthew and elsewhere in the New Testament that he had authority to raise the dead. Most notably, not just Jarius' daughter and the child of the lady from Nane, but the resurrection of Lazarus, which was the most monumental miracle of Jesus' life, the most monumental one. The other resurrections that he did were very soon or immediately after the death of the individual. In this case Jesus waited four days until serious and severe decomposition had set in so there would be no explanation of resuscitation or anything else and he did it in a very public way in Jerusalem or just outside of Jerusalem, two miles to the east in Bethany right at the time of the Passover when the population of Jerusalem had swelled to its largest number through the year, because the Passover was the main feast, and there he demonstrated his power over death.

His power went beyond that. His authority went beyond that in that he could delegate his authority. Not only did he have the authority, more authority than the official teachers of Israel, that would say he had authority with the truth, authority over the physical world, authority over the spiritual world, authority over the world of death, but he had also the authority to delegate that same authority to others, which he did to the apostles. He sent them out to cast out demons and to heal all manner of diseases. He also gave similar authority, according to Luke 10, to the 70 disciples who went out to do similar things.

In Chapter 9 of Matthew another kind of authority is discussed and that is the authority to forgive sin. That opened up another dimension in which Jesus exercised authority. You remember he forgave sin, a remarkable thing to do especially in the face of the Jewish leaders who were watching him and realized that only God had the right to forgive sin and he was thereby claiming to be equal with God and they got the message.

Beyond that with his ever expanding authority as you go through the gospels you find that in John 5 and this is a remarkable things and also reiterated a number of times through John's gospel he had the authority to execute judgment. He said that the Father had committed all judgment to him and that he had the authority to execute judgment and with that the authority to raise everybody in the

history of the world ultimately in the resurrection, either the resurrection unto life or the resurrection unto damnation. Someday, he said, all the dead of all the ages will hear the voice of the Son of God and will rise and he gave them a preview of coming attractions when he did that in the case of Lazarus. He said, Lazarus come forth and everybody got a preview of his ability to raise the dead ultimately in the final judgment. And so his authority extended to judgment, to judgment that is eternal raising the dead either to condemnation or to eternal life.

And there was one other monumental expression of his authority. "He had authority to lay down his own life and take it up again," John 10:18 says. So as you study the authority of Jesus Christ and you watch it begin to expand and expand all of these remarkable testimonies to the unfolding of his authority culminate here in verse 18 with the word all. "All authority has been given to me in heaven and earth." There was nothing outside of his authority. He had authority with the truth greater than any earthly teacher. He had authority over all of the physical forces in the natural world. He had authority over all of the supernatural world both fallen angels and holy ones. He had authority over the realm of the dead so that he could raise the dead. He had authority that could be delegated to others so that they could function with his power and authority. He had authority to deal with the spiritual world of sin and to forgive sin. He had authority to execute final judgment and to condemn people to eternal hell or grant them eternal life in heaven. He had authority to lay down his own life and take it back again and Jesus sums it all up by saying, "All authority has been given to me in heaven and on earth." All authority! And with that consummate statement of authority he proceeds to say, "Go and make disciples."

In the same that he commanded the truth to be heard and understood, in the same way that he commanded the physical world to obey him, in the same way that he commanded the supernatural world of created angels and demons to do his will, in the same way that he dealt with the spiritual issues of sin, in the same way that some day he'll call the dead out of the grave and command some to hell and some to heaven, in all of those same ways, the same way he commanded death himself in his own resurrection he commands us here to do this. It comes with the same compelling authority. This is a monumental statement, a monumental statement and it puts us in a position of submission or rebellion doesn't it?

The word authority here, let's talk about that. All of that was about the word all. Let me talk about the word authority. The word is exsuthia. It means permission, privilege, right, and power. Permission, privilege, right and power. It is not merely the authority a great conqueror may claim to have by virtue of his deeds of conquest. It is the authority that someone has innately by virtue of who he is. And Jesus had it because he was God's King, God's Anointed. The best way to explain authority would be this way: and this is purely a MacArthur definition, but it works in my mind. To say you have all authority is to say that you have complete freedom of action and will, that you have complete freedom of action and will. To break that down you have the right and the power and the privilege to do exactly what you want, when you want, with whom you want, how you want. Now on an earthly level we could say that works for a dictator. He does exactly what he wants, when he wants, with whom he wants, how he wants. That would be true of kings who are sovereign. And so we have a bit of an earthly perspective on that.

But that describes in a word sovereignty: complete freedom of action and will, no one controlling your will and no one controlling your action. You are completely free in both cases, total complete freedom of action and will. Now where did he get this? Verse 18 says, all authority has been what? Given to me. Who may we assume gave it? God the Father. God the Father granted equal authority to the

Son because the Son is equal in essence with the Father, and so he shares equal authority.

In Daniel 7:13-14, "I kept looking in the night visions," Daniel says, "and behold with the clouds of heaven one like the Son of Man was coming." That's a picture of Christ, the Son of Man. "And he came up to the Ancient of Days," that's God, "and was presented before him." This is the scene: the Son of Man comes before the Ancient of Days in Daniel's vision. "And to him, the Son of Man was given dominion, glory, and the kingdom that all the peoples nations and men of every language might serve him, his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which will not pass away and his kingdom is one which will not be destroyed." And there Daniel was given a glimpse of the Ancient of Days, God the Father turning over sovereign authority to the Son. God gave him, God who was absolutely and utterly sovereign granted to the Son equal sovereignty.

Listen to Revelation 2:27, speaking of the Son and his kingdom, it says, "He shall rule them with a rod of iron," that's right out of the Psalms, Psalm 2, When the Messiah comes and sets up his kingdom, "He will rule with a rod of iron as the vessels of the potter are broken to pieces." In other words he's going to control life on this earth and he's going to smash whatever he needs to smash, he going to be authoritative. Then at the end of verse 27 Revelation 2, "As I also," Jesus writes, "Have received authority from my Father." So this is an authority that God the Father has granted to God the Son.

Psalm 2 says the same thing. In verse 7 he's talking about, "Thou art my Son, today I have begotten Thee," which is quoted in Hebrews 1. "Ask of me and I will surely give the nations as Thine inheritance and the very ends of the earth as Thy possession. Thy shall break them with a rod of iron, shatter them like earthenware." And so the Father grants this great authority to the Son.

Now that is important to establish in our understanding of the great commission. You can go back to Matthew 28 at this point because it firmly establishes the sovereignty of Christ over his church. He is the Lord of his church. When you come to salvation you confess Jesus as what? Lord, Romans 10:9-10. You acknowledge the lordship of Jesus Christ. He is Lord not only over the created world, he is Lord over your life and mine and as believers we enter into a relationship with a sovereign. I am absolutely unable for the life of me to comprehend somebody thinking you can be a Christian and not be under the lordship of Jesus Christ. That is absolutely inconceivable to me. There are people who think that. They do not really understand the Scripture. He is sovereign and he establishes his sovereign authority in verse 18 in order that he might press us under this authority when he unfolds the command of verses 19 and 20.

There are always those people who will come to Christ as their advocate and come to Christ as their Savior and want him to redeem them and plead for them, but are unwilling to submit to him as their Sovereign. That is flagrant disobedience. He is Savior and he is Lord, the Father himself has made him Lord. His word is commanding to us and we have no other option but to obey. That's why verse 19, the order really should be, "Therefore go." Therefore linking up with the expression of sovereignty and authority in verse 18. So the first three things that we have to understand about fulfilling this mission of the church is availability, worship and then submission.

That brings us then to the heart of the great commission, verses 19 and 20. We'll just look at these and bring to bear upon you what I think is very familiar already. Verse 19, let's start with obedience. The next component is obedience and you can see the flow: we're there, we're available, we're worshipping, Christ is the absolute priority of our lives, we come to grips with his total sovereign

authority, that brings us to the point of submission, submission in heart and soul produces obedience in action.

Verse 19, "Go, therefore and make disciples of all the nations baptizing them in the name of the Father, and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you." We'll stop at that point for this particular moment. The command is linked to the submission obviously with the word therefore. Because Christ is sovereign, because he has all authority, go and make disciples. You know at first when you first read that and if you're thinking about it, it just seems like an impossible command. Go and make disciples that seems like an enterprise that is frankly beyond us and it is. There's no question about it and yet we're commanded to do it and must respond. And to go to the whole world, all nations, that is our calling. This is the imperative that defines the mission of the church.

And that's why I thought so many times through the years belonging to a church that understands this is crucial. Belonging to a church that is engaged in this is crucial because we're all under authority. In Mark 16:15, the words are recorded, "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature." In Luke 24:47, "Repentance and forgiveness of sins should be preached in his name among all nations." Those are just very variations that Jesus also spoke that day with that large crowd recorded by Mark and Luke and they add to this dimension of make disciples that we are to preach the gospel to every creature and to preach forgiveness of sin and repentance. So we go. We preach that sinners should repent because God will forgive their sins, believe the gospel and become followers of Christ, or learners or disciples. This is our purpose.

And I think Jesus stated it very well back in Matthew 4 when he called his disciples together with him, he gave them a preliminary statement that his sort of follows when you remember in Matthew 4, I think it's verse 19, he said to them, "Follow me and I'll make you," what? Fishers of men. Now in being obedient there are three things that are required. And they are participles that modify the main verb. First is going, and if you were to translate this accurately from the Greek it would be going baptizing teaching, all ing endings because that's the form of a participle that modifies the main verb. The main verb make disciples how? Going, baptizing, teaching, those are the three component elements of making disciples. Going literally having gone, you can't do it until you go to the place where the unconverted are. That's where it all starts, going.

Early in his ministry you remember our Lord put limits on the disciples. He didn't want them to go too far. He kind of let them out a little bit at a time and as they began to understand what it was they were doing and what they were saying he'd let them out a little more and little more. You can track that in Matthew's gospel from Chapter 10 on through Chapter 15, until finally here he is he's leaving and he's turning the whole thing over to them and says now you can go every place. Remember early on he told them to only go certain places and talk to certain people and check out your reception here and there and in the training process didn't want them to be confronting things they could deal with so very carefully he trained them in that process. Now is the time to turn them loose. And here they are turned loose along with the rest of us to go to the whole world.

Sadly, really, Israel had forfeited this great privilege and so the Lord gives it to a group of 500 people, 500 people up in Galilee. Jews, yes, but they were going to go beyond the borders of Israel and they were going to be part of building the church and it wouldn't take long because very soon Peter would go to a Gentile named Simon, a named Cornelius and Cornelius was a Centurion and he would be a convert out of the Gentile world. And then the Lord would put his hands on a man named Paul, very

soon in the book of Acts in the 9th Chapter and convert him on the Damascus Road and he would be the instrument to preach the gospel to the Gentiles and take them out of darkness and bring them to light and the church would begin to unfold. In fact it all started really at Pentecost when the Spirit came and there were all those pilgrims from all over the Gentile world, many of them would have been Gentile proselytes to Judaism who heard the wonderful works of God in their own language, as they spoke in many languages and took back the message.

And so Israel, sadly was set aside. Jesus said to them in Matthew's gospel how through parables in Matthew 22, a most tragic parable, the king prepares a wedding feast for his son and the picture is God preparing a celebration for his Son. He sent out his slaves to call those who had been invited to the wedding feast. You know the way they did weddings in those days was kind of interesting. They didn't operate on the clock because they didn't have any formulas for fast food preparation in those days so they would simply say there's a wedding coming and we're going to work toward that event. We have to get all the animals together and we have to do all the killing and we have to prepare everything and when everything is prepared we're going to let you know. So you'd get a wedding invitation that would say sometime in the next few months there will be a wedding. You are the pre-invited guests and we'll be notifying you when it's time to come. Israel was the pre-invited guest to the celebration honoring Jesus.

And so those who had been invited to the wedding feast, it was now time for the feast to take place. You sent out slaves to collect them and they were unwilling to come. That's Israel, pre-invited guests all along being told their Messiah would come, their Messiah would come, and when time for the coming of Messiah and celebration they refused.

And he sent out other slaves said tell those who have been invited the dinner is ready, the oxen, and the fattened livestock are butchered and everything is ready come to the feast. But they paid no attention and went their way, one to his farm and another to his business. Some of the Jews were just indifferent. They weren't hostile they were just indifferent. The rest seized his slaves, mistreated them and killed them. Can you imagine that? All you're doing is taking a wedding invitation and you get killed for it? Somebody would be outraged hearing that story but that's exactly what Israel did. On the one hand some of them were indifferent and on the other hand some of them were hostile and murderous and killed the apostles who were the servants.

The king was so enraged he sent his armies, destroyed those murderers, and set their city on fire, and there's the prediction of the destruction of Jerusalem. That's the end for you people, you pre-invited guests. The king went out and destroyed the people and burned their city up. Then what? He said to his slaves, "The wedding is ready. Those who were invited were not worthy." That's Israel, they're set aside. "Go, therefore, to the main highways and as many as you find there invite to the wedding feast. And they went into the streets and gathered together all they found." They got everybody and just stuffed them into the hall and they were the dinner guests. And that's a picture of the collection, the eclectic collection of the church that becomes the new people of God to celebrate the arrival of the Son and proclaim the gospel that saves.

The nation forfeits the privilege and all you've got up there is 500 folks in Galilee and a little while later, a week or so later when Jesus gathers with the little group of disciples on the hill of the Ascension and leaves there's just a few of them there and a little while after that when Pentecost comes and the Spirit of God descends there's only 120 there. Even if you add them all up just a matter of a few hundred people in the midst of a nation that had rejected their own Messiah and so

God carves out using those people, a new association, a new fellowship and he says to these folks here at the end of the book of Matthew, here now you've got to go, you've got to go.

Any reluctance they had to go was assisted by persecution early in the Book of Acts. Do you remember that? Because when the church was persecuted early they began to scatter and the scattering of these disciples who were persecuted, the disciples began to grow and the day of Pentecost 3,000, the group grows from 120 in the south to 3,000 and probably some from Galilee would have been included in that and then it goes again and thousands more and as I said there may have been 20,000 in a matter of weeks and persecution escalates and they start to scatter. We see Phillip, for example, scattering and reaching an Ethiopian Eunuch and we see a church planted up in Antioch and it isn't long before out of Antioch Paul and Barnabus are called and they go the Gentile world and so it goes. The church begins to move out.

Now we're a part of that and there's still a great world out there and many of them haven't heard. I was reminded of that again when I was over in the land of Russia where there are thousands of cities with no gospel, with no church, with no testimony to the truth of Jesus Christ. And there is still so much ground to cover, so many places to go and unfortunately some of the people who are the most aggressive in going are representatives of the darkness and not the light, aren't they? Going and taking false teaching and cults and who knows what. But that's where it all starts and we're in the flow. There is still those to reach and some of them are right around us in the world in which we live every day.

Second component of making disciples you've got to go where the folks are who need the message. Secondly he says baptizing them, baptizing them. Why does he bring up this? This is not a spiritual activity, it is a physical activity. Well without going into a lot of things 'cause we already did a message on baptism in the series, I simply remind you that baptism because synonymous with salvation. I mean if somebody claimed to be a Christian there was a way to verify that. Have you been baptized? Because baptism was the public confession of faith in Christ because it was a price to pay for that. It meant that you got unsynagogued. It means that you were rejected within your own Jewish family and your own Jewish community because you were being identified with the crucified Christ who in the minds of the Jewish leaders and most of the population couldn't possibly be the Messiah, I mean imagine the Messiah coming into the world and getting killed by the Romans. Just an unthinkable thing.

That's why in the book of Acts when the apostles went out to preach they had to preach that Jesus must needs have suffered. That's why the Jews even today don't know what to do with Isaiah 53, the Suffering Servant passage they have no idea what to do with it. They usually refer it to themselves as the suffering nation because they didn't want to admit that their Messiah could be executed. And certainly if they rejected him they couldn't have been the Messiah.

And so the way that publicly demonstrated true faith in Christ was baptism and when a person was saved, genuinely saved, they were baptized. And so the idea of baptizing them simply means giving them the gospel so that they might hear and believe and confess Christ publicly, which is indicative of the heart.

You remember that Jesus said, "If you confess me before men I will" what? "Confess you before my Father is in heaven. If you deny me before men I'll deny you." A beautiful symbolism is baptism because it pictures, burial, death, burial, and resurrection, which is exactly what happens when you

put your faith in Christ you, of course, are joined with him in his death, burial and resurrection as he bears your guilt and you are granted his righteousness.

So when we go out and preach the gospel we have in mind bringing the message of salvation to sinners, a gospel which is portrayed in baptism, and if they truly believe they are to be baptized as that open and public confession of their faith in Jesus Christ. So discipling starts at that point. That's why we made such an important issue out of baptism because it is there where one is obedient to what the Scripture says. And that brings us a deep pain in my own heart as I see baptism so deprioritized in our day when it is such an urgent issue in the words of our own Lord Jesus in this passage.

Baptism, notice and this is what makes it so important. They're to be baptized in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. When I wrote the book, Reckless Faith there's a chapter in that book on what are the fundamentals of Christianity because people are always debating how do I know when someone is really a Christian? Who do I fellowship with? What are the sort of basic bottom line non-negotiables? What are the fundamentals? And, of course, the fundamentals are all around salvation. We may differ on a lot of things in terms of various sundry doctrines, but one area that is absolutely necessary for us to have any real fellowship is the gospel. And I really believe, and this statement of baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, there is a summation of the gospel there, the whole of the Trinity.

To baptize someone in the name of the Father is to recognize the one true God. Then to baptize someone in the name of the Son is to recognize that that one true God was incarnated in Jesus Christ. And so that the person and work, the righteous life of Christ, his death, burial and resurrection are essentially components of his name because his name means who he is and to be baptized in the name of the Holy Spirit is to affirm the saving work of the Holy Spirit as well as the work of the Spirit through the Son. So you really have in that formula the name of the Father, the name of the Son, the name of the Holy Spirit the summation of the whole involvement of the Trinity in a redemptive purpose.

What is necessary for someone to be saved? What is necessary for saving faith? First of all to believe in the one true God, the one true God as revealed in Scripture, the God who is the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, then to believe in Christ as incarnate God. That means that you must believe in the one true God of the Old Testament who is a Trinity, you must believe that that God incarnated himself in Jesus Christ, therefore, you must believe in the virgin birth, the sinless life of Christ, because he was God, the one true God who is holy, his life was sinless, then you must believe that in that sinless incarnate life God worked the perfect redemption through his substitutionary sacrifice and resurrection and ascension and you must believe in the Holy Spirit who is operative in the person of Jesus Christ who is the one who convicts the world of sin and righteousness and judgment who makes the truth knowable and understandable and who is the agent of conversion so that we are begotten again by the Spirit. All of that is captured in that Trinitarian statement. And by the way it is one of the great statements in the Scripture on the Trinity.

That is essential to the understanding of the gospel, so we go and we baptize with all that that means of the fullness of understanding what I call the drive train of biblical revelation and that is the essentials from the reality of the one true God in his Trinitarian form being incarnated in Christ, to live the perfect life, died a substitutionary death, rose again, ascended back to the right hand of God and has sent the Spirit to bring about the marvelous reality of conversion. When you believe in that

you've articulated the gospel and the baptism is the public affirmation of that understanding, the outward confession of inward submission.

And so we go and we go to the nations of the world, we go to the peoples of the world near and far, and we tell them the gospel of forgiveness in Jesus Christ with all of these components that they may be baptized with a full understanding of the Trinity and the work of the Trinity in redemptive purpose.

Then the third component is given us in verse 20, teaching. There is another participle. Baptism represents the initiation into the life of God, into the Christian life, into the new life, teaching picks it up at that point. Obviously teaching goes beyond just teaching the gospel because he says, "Teaching them to observe all that I commanded you." So what do we do when we lead someone to Christ? We tell them this: you've come to faith in Christ, you've publicly professed Christ with an understanding of God's unfolding redemptive purpose as worked through him, his Son and his Spirit, now it's our responsibility to teach you that you must spend the rest of your life in obedience to everything the word of God says. That's it! Lifelong obedience to every command under the authority of Christ.

So discipling someone, you go, you bring them the gospel and once they've confessed Christ then you begin the process of teaching them obedience so that being obedient and submitting to the authority of Christ in their life they will grow to maturity and fulfill this same great commission as we pass that responsibility to them.

Our obedience is built on availability, worship, and submission and that's exactly what we endeavor to reproduce in them. You say now this is a formidable task. I'm not sure I'm up to this. Well that's why the last point is here. We've talked about the first four elements that make this commission a reality, but let's look at the last one: power, power. I'm so glad he said this, end of verse 20, "And lo, I am with you," what? Aren't you glad he didn't say and Lo, I will check on you now and then. I don't know how well we do with an intermittent power supply. Do you? I'm so glad he said Lo, I am with you what? Always. I wouldn't want to go out and endeavor to engage myself in this alone.

Literally that word always in the Greek is all the days, every day, every day. It really should be broken down into that component part. It is not some generic bland kind of comprehensive term. He is saying, I emphatic ego am with you every day. There never will be a day you can't fulfill the great commission. There never will be a day that you can't take the gospel to somebody. There never will be a day of impotence. I will be with you every day. How long Lord? Even to the end of the age. Soon teleah. Should be translated consummation, to the finish. Not just the end in the simple sense, but it's not just I'm going to be with you until it ends. I'm going to be with you 'til it consummates. I'm going to be with you until the great even that brings it all to its finale. What does he mean? Judgment. I'm going to be with you 'til the judgment. I'm going to be with you 'til, according to the terminology of Matthew 13, 'til the angels come and bring together everybody and do the sorting out in the judgment. I'm going to be with you until the very end of the present age, 'til it's time to set up the kingdom. What a great promise, tremendous promise that we're not out there on our own. He's going to be there, right to the end, every single day.

I don't know about you, but I'm so glad for that because it seems to me that every single day of my life I have more spiritual responsibility than I can bear. When I came back from Russia I had to stop on the way back and in two days preach seven times after that long trip and I sort of calculated that in ten days I preached about 30 times. And that's maybe a little shy of reality. That might seem like

an unusual pattern for some people but it doesn't seem to be too unusual for me to have such experiences. And I find great comfort in the promise of continuity the promise that wherever you are, whatever the task, whatever the enterprise engaged in for the sake of the advancement of the gospel and the kingdom I'm there every day strengthening you.

So what allows us to fulfill this commission? Availability, to be there to listen to the word of God and understand what he asks. Worship, to have a passion for the glory of Christ that drives us. Submission, to understand that we are under the authority of the one who has all authority. Obedience, which takes that understanding of authority and puts legs on it and a voice to it. And then the promise of power that the presence of the Lord will always be there every day to enable us to do what frankly is humanly impossible.

I'm going to close with one of my favorite little parables that I found years and years and years ago. I think it makes a good point. Let's go back to where we started, the mission of the church. On a dangerous seacoast where shipwrecks often occur there was a little crude lifesaving station. The building was just a hut and there was only one boat but the few devoted members kept a constant watch over the sea and with no thought for themselves they went out day and night tirelessly searching for the lost. Many lives were saved by this wonderful little life station and it became famous. Some of those who were saved and various others in the surrounding area wanted to become associated with the station, the lighthouse. They wanted to give their time, their money, and effort for the support of its work and new boats were bought and crews were trained and the little lifesaving station grew. Some of the members of the lifesaving station were unhappy that the building was so crude and poorly equipped so they felt a more comfortable place should be provided as a first refuge of those who were saved from the sea when their ships sunk so they replaced the emergency cots and bed with better furniture in an enlarged building.

And now the lifesaving station became a popular gathering for its members and they decorated it beautifully and furnished it exquisitely because they used it as sort of a club. Fewer members were now interested in going to sea on lifesaving missions so they hired lifeboat crews to do the work. The lifesaving station's motif still prevailed in the club's decorations and there was a liturgical lifeboat in the room where club initiations were held. About this time a large ship was wrecked off the coast and the hired crews brought in loads of cold wet half-drown people. They were dirty and sick and foreign. The beautiful new club was considerably messed up so the property committee immediately had a shower house built outside the club where the victims of shipwrecks could be cleaned up before coming in to the club. At the next meeting there was a split in the club membership.

Most of the members wanted to stop the club's lifesaving activity because it was unpleasant and a hindrance to the normal social life of the club. Some members insisted on lifesaving as their primary purpose and pointed out that they were still called a lifesaving station, but they were voted down and told if they wanted to save the lives of various kinds of people that were shipwrecked in those waters they could build their own lifesaving station down the coast, which they did. As the years went by the new station experienced the same changes that occurred in the old. It evolved into a club and yet another lifesaving station was founded.

History continued to repeat itself and if you visit that coast today you'll find a number of exclusive clubs along the shore. Shipwrecks are still frequent but most of the people drown. Interesting metaphor isn't it of what happens to the church when it loses sight of its mission.

Father, we thank you for this wonderful day and these potent reminders of responsibility granted to us, privilege given to us. Make us faithful, Lord, to fulfill this great commission in a way that will maximize our time here, our abilities here, our opportunities here. Convict us when we're unfaithful to this and spur us on to faithfulness that we might be instruments in the unfolding plan of redemption for your glory. The church, may it become like a maternity ward where there's the constant cry of newborn babes in Christ. Use us mightily to that end, we pray. In Christ's name. Amen.

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