

Building a Resilient Church Culture: Part 2 - Clear Mission

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Date: 17 July 2022

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[0 : 00] While I get settled here, let me invite you to join me in the Gospel of Matthew chapter 28. Last week I began preaching a series of sermons expressing our need to build a resilient church culture.

Last week was the overview, the summary, at which time I made the case that we live in days of growing soft totalitarianism. This is largely a problem concerning the very definition of mankind and as making inroads into our culture at a sweeping pace.

For the sake of time, I'm not going to remake that case to you, but I would encourage you to go back and listen to that recording or request my notes. I'll be happy to send them to you. I began last week with three prerequisite statements that I would like to repeat in brief this morning before we proceed any further.

Number one, as a general practice, we preach expositional sermons at Christ Family Church. Most simply put, this means that we take for the sermons point or points, the main point or points of that week's text.

And most regularly we walk through a book of the Bible together. We want to be especially careful not to read into a text what we want that text to say.

[1 : 29] And many errors have arisen through such a practice. So as we approach a text topically, I want each of you to be especially discerning.

Secondly, I am not trying to be an alarmist. That said, your elders feel a burden to prepare you for challenges that we believe are here and are coming.

We love you very much. And we want good for you and we want great glory for our God. And third, the six total weeks we will spend thinking about building a resilient church culture will not be nearly enough to exhaust the topic.

Nor will each week's consideration of steps that need to be taken do that either. So we will need to talk more about it, both formally and informally.

We need to ask questions, push at one another's thinking, and most importantly, spend time with the Lord in His Word as we consider the days in which we live.

[2 : 33] So, how do we build a resilient church culture? A church that will stand against the rising tide of soft totalitarianism.

We will have to build it. It won't just happen. We will have to be strong because the tide will be destructive. And it will have to be cultural, ingrained into who we are as a church.

Well, this morning we will consider the first of five things your elders believe we need to be working on. I gave these to you in summary last week. Quite by accident, they spell the acronym CRASH. So we're on clear mission this morning. The first of those. See, and really I didn't do it on purpose.

So see, clear mission. What is the mission of the church?

If we are not crystal clear on why we exist, then we will always be distracted by some lesser purpose. Not necessarily bad things, but lesser things.

[3 : 41] Not the purpose of the church. And we will need to readily identify what battles we ought to engage in. And what the war is that we cannot avoid.

So we're going to look together today at Matthew chapter 28, verses 18 through 20. The closing of the gospel of Matthew. Before I read it, beloved, let me remind you that this is God's word to us.

And it was written for his glory and our good. And so we would all do well to listen to it in order to believe its promises and to obey its commands. Matthew 28, beginning in verse 18.

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. Now in considering this text and asking the question, What is the mission of the church?

[4 : 56] We must first consider the amazing Christological statement that Jesus makes concerning himself in verse 18. We can't ignore, we can't rush past this to the application.

Because he says, All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. We have to stop for a moment to steep in this reality.

Jesus is totally in charge. There's not a single thing in this world that escapes his power. Our Lord reigns.

All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to Christ. This episode, as Matthew records it for us, takes place just after Jesus' resurrection.

He has lived the perfectly righteous life that we cannot live, but that is required of us. He has died a most gruesome death on the cross. And above that, he has paid the penalty for our sin.

[6 : 00] He received the wrath of God in himself that was due us. This was a debt that with all of our penitents could not have been repaid.

And Matthew 28 tells us, He has risen from the grave. He has defeated death. He has guaranteed that for those who place saving faith in his person and his work, we will one day ourselves be resurrected.

It is this Jesus, right, that is speaking to these 11 disciples that he's gathered on a mountain top, Matthew tells us, and says, All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.

What must his disciples have thought? What an astounding thing for him to say. Perhaps our minds were drawn to a text like Daniel chapter 7, where we see this title given of who we now realize is the Christ, the Son of Man.

And Jesus calls himself this again and again. And Matthew is careful to record that for us. And Daniel records a vision in chapter 7 and verse 13, where he says, Behold, with the clouds of heaven there came one like a son of man.

[7 : 18] And he came to the ancient of days and was presented before him. Now listen, verse 14. And to him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him.

His dominion is an everlasting dominion which shall not pass away, and his kingdom one that shall not be destroyed. This would have been a good text for the disciples' minds to go through, and we can't be sure that it's where it went.

But Jesus is certainly riffing off this. He's saying, This is me. I am the Son of Man. I am the Christ. And I have been given all the power.

And if their minds just happen to go to a text like this, then Jesus' following command would not have been a surprise to them. Because Daniel 7, 14 says he's been given dominion and glory and a kingdom.

Why? That all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him. And so just after Jesus says that all authority in heaven and earth has been given to him, he says, Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations.

[8 : 32] Because I have all authority in response to what I have just told you of my authority. Go. Now, this Greek word that we find in our English as a two-letter word, go, is much more complicated in the Greek.

Surprise, as the Greek often is. I'm going to try to pronounce it for you. I don't know if I'll pronounce it correctly, but I believe it's poru fentes. Which means to go or to travel, right?

So that's why we get the English go. That's why this text is most classically used as a missionary text. And it is that, right? It means go to the ends of the earth.

The text itself says that we're to make disciples of all nations. But it is not only that. It is that.

But it is not only that. And we can know this as we look into the Greek a little bit more. First, this Greek word is in the aorist verb tense.

[9 : 43] In this case, not indicating a particular moment of going. This is not a singular getting on a plane and going. But it is a constant activity of going.

It's also in the passive grammatical voice, which means the subject applied in this case as you, you go, is being acted upon.

So a fair translation of go. And hear me, I'm grateful that it's translated this way. But we could expand it by saying, in your God-ordained going, make disciples.

Wherever the Lord sends you, be about this work of making disciples. Jesus gives us a command. It's not just for these 11. We now have this text and it speaks to us as well. He gives us this command to make disciples in our God-ordained going about.

[10:46] Which I want to be clear may include packing up and spending your life in a remote place. Or it may include commuting to a thankless job.

But wherever you are sent, you ought to be part of this disciple-making endeavor. You see, even as Jesus has all authority, he is pleased to use secondary means to bring about his purposes.

And praise be to God for this. We get the opportunity to join our Lord in his mission in this world. We get the joy of being involved in what it is that he is accomplishing.

But because Jesus has the authority, it is an empowered command. And he does not want us to miss this. It's not, I have all the authority, and so I'm just going to command you to go and good luck in the going.

He doesn't want us to miss that he intends to empower it, which is why he says in the last half of verse 20, And behold, which means pay attention. He's grabbing their attention.

[11:52] Hear this thing I'm about to say to you. I am with you always to the end of the age. Jesus possesses all the authority, commands us to make disciples, and promises to accompany us with his authority.

And beloved, this ought to embolden the listener to Jesus' words. We have nothing to fear for if God is for us.

Who can be against us? Regardless of where we are sent divinely by our Lord. Charles Spurgeon once said, half our fears arise from neglect of the Bible.

We need to rightly understand text like this. All authority in heaven and earth has been given to me. Behold, I am with you always to the end of the age. And there exists in between these two things, bookended by the power of Christ, a command to go and make disciples of all nations.

[13:02] A promise to empower the work with his authority. But what are the means for this disciple making? He's told us to go and make disciples.

Are we to go about willy-nilly? What are we meant to be doing as we go and make disciples? And if you are an astute listener, you may have gathered where I am going with this.

As I have posed the question to us this morning, what is the mission of the church? The means for the command to make disciples of all nations is the church.

This is the mission of the church, to make disciples. Now, how do I arrive at that from this text? Because I see two activities here expressed in our disciple making.

Number one, we see the activity of baptism. We're to make disciples, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

[14:02] Bobby Jameson in his book, Understanding Baptism, defined baptism in this way. Quote, Baptism is a church's act of affirming and portraying a believer's union with Christ by immersing him or her in water.

And a believer's act of publicly committing him or herself to Christ and his people, thereby uniting a believer to the church and marking off him or her from the world.

Baptism is an ordinance of the church. The word ordinance from the Latin ordinate, which means to put in order. Baptism is the membership ordinance.

It's how we mark off who is part of the church and who is not part of the church. We don't have time to prove this definition out from the word this morning.

I'd love to spend some time with you thinking about this together. But we believe that baptizing individuals in the name of our triune God is this welcoming ordinance of the church.

[15:03] Normatively, churches baptize. We can find an exception. The case of the Ethiopian eunuch being sent home as the only Christian to a people who had yet to hear the gospel.

But this is not normative in the Bible. It's normative that churches are baptizing. Second, we see in the text teaching, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you.

The church is given the ongoing work of teaching the ways of Jesus. And this happens both in the formal gathering of the church and in the informal relationships with the church.

Let me show you that from Ephesians chapter 4. You could turn there if you'd like. If not, I'll try to read it carefully for you. Beginning in verse 11 and following. And Christ gave the apostles, the prophets, which I would argue is the word.

We now have the apostles and the prophets in the word. The evangelists, the shepherd teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry. For building up the body of Christ.

[16:14] You see both a formal thing happening and the equipping of saints for work of ministry. Until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God. To mature manhood.

To the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ. So that we may no longer be children tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine.

By human cunning. By craftiness and deceitful schemes. Rather, speaking the truth in love. Which is what? It's this work of us teaching one another.

We are to grow up in every way into him who is the head into Christ. Christ from whom the whole body joined and held together. Every joint with which it is equipped. When each part is working properly.

Makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love. The church, both formally and informally. Gathered and sent is meant to be about this work of teaching disciples to observe all that Jesus commanded.

[17:16] And this work will not be over until Christ returns. We need to be taught and taught and taught.

Because we're not just learning information. We're learning to observe all that Jesus has commanded us. We're learning to be obedient. This is not a work that will be finished until Christ returns.

I am building a house right now. This task will not be completed until the house is completed. I cannot say that I have made a house yet. I'm in the process of making a house.

I cannot merely break ground on the job site and say that I have built a house. I'm in the process. It is being built. This text is a command to make disciples.

People who follow Jesus. Not merely converts, but disciples. Teaching them to observe all that Jesus has commanded us.

[18:22] This task will not be done. Ephesians 4.13 Until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God. To mature manhood to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.

What a work ahead of us while the Lord tarries. While we await Him making disciples. Seeing people come into the faith and seeing them toward maturity in Christ.

Now, I want to take a step away from our text, Matthew 28, for a bit to consider this further.

Jonathan Lehman, the editorial director for Nine Marks, is characterized in numerous publications, but most recently in a new little book entitled, What is the Church's Mission?

How timely and fitting. He's characterized five different types of churches. Each with a different mission. And I want to read you a brief excerpt from this little book to kind of help us wrap our minds around the potential dangers of not having a clear view of what the mission of the church is.

So only one of these five is commendable, to be clear. Quote, church number one emphasizes the great commission and Jesus' command to make disciples.

[19:43] Yet when they say make disciples, they mean make converts. So church number one gears everything in the church toward non-Christians.

As if local churches basically exist for the sake of evangelism. They talk about Christian growth some, but their programs focus on individuals, not the corporate body or family.

They don't see the connection between their evangelism and being a vibrant, united, otherworldly family. Based on church number one's mission playbook, let's call it Seekers Church.

Church number two is similar to church number one, but it appeals less to middle class longings for things like purpose and more to basic human desires for health and wealth.

Join their service on Sunday and you'll hear about God's desire to bless us. If only we would have enough faith. Based on its playbook, let's call church number two, Prosperity Church.

[20:46] While churches number one and number two emphasize how Jesus is here for us, church number three and number four emphasize how we are here for Jesus.

Church number three, we can call Justice Church. Join them on Sunday and you'll hear the preacher say, we should care for the downtrodden, wake up to the nation's structural injustices, attend to the environment, and generally do good in the world.

Church number four is another version of church number three, but it focuses on the structural injustices that concern political conservatives, like abortion, same-sex marriage, and religious freedom.

Call it Righteous Nation Church. It wants to save the nation from moral decay and make it safe for Christianity. At best, both Justice Church and Righteous Nation Church focus on discipleship, the moral shape of Christians, and the command to love our neighbors.

At worst, they risk sliding a foot or at least a toe into Phariseeism, meaning they would lay down laws and political certainties where Scripture doesn't. Members leave church on Sundays not so much thanking God for His grace in their lives, but feeling superior to other people because of their moral and political convictions.

[22 : 06] To be sure, many churches occupy a couple of these examples. I'm simply outlining stock types, not trying to caricature your church so that we can all be more careful.

Furthermore, I trust that some variety between churches is God-given, just like an individual Christian working on Wall Street and one teaching in a run-down school will have different daily ministries. So a church in the suburbs might have a strong counseling ministry, while a church next door to a refugee camp might excel in serving the poor.

Praise God. Still, there's a difference between being sensitive to the economic waves and political winds surrounding us and being driven by those waves and winds.

When churches are driven, their playbooks, their sense of their mission easily succumb to biblical imbalances and worldly agendas. Seekers' church show signs of having succumbed to consumerism, prosperity church to materialism, justice church to political progressivism, and righteous nation church to nationalism, even if all four have orthodox statements of faith.

And you can see with all of these caricatures, seekers, prosperity, justice, righteous nation, that there's some good and some truth at the base of it all. But when it becomes the point, when it becomes the mission of the church, it can go horribly awry.

[23 : 30] This is why I'm trying to make this case, right? We need to have a very clear view. What is the mission of the church? Otherwise, we will be distracted.

Lehman goes on to speak of the church he believes is most biblical. That is the church I am making a case for today. By asking two important questions. Number one, what is the mission of the church acting all together?

What do we do as Christ family church? And secondly, what is the mission of the church members sent from that church throughout the week?

Or what is our mission and what is your mission? And I think this distinction is helpful.

And I think this is something that we need to be chewing on and thinking about together. He answers these two questions simply. And I think this is right on. Number one, what is the mission of the church acting all together?

[24 : 32] Acting together as a church, our mission is to make disciples. That's what we do as a church. Number two, what is the mission of church members throughout the week?

Living as individuals, church members throughout the week are to be disciples. Be followers of Jesus Christ. So the church acting together reads the Bible, preaches the Bible, prays the Bible, sings the Bible, and sees the Bible in the ordinances of baptism and communion.

We do so by the prescription of the Bible. We do what the scripture tells us to do when we gather as a church. This disciple making together will include things like sending you to your respective spheres to share the good news of Jesus, teaching you to be faithful husbands and wives, parents and children, equipping you to work as unto the Lord and not for men.

It may also include things like starting a biblical counseling center or a pastoral residency, planting new churches or starting a school. But the efforts of the church acting together must always be aimed at making disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you.

There's so much in this world that wants to drag our attention away from this primary, singular purpose of the church together. And if we do this well, church members then will be equipped to be salt and light in their respective spheres, always with a mind to the collective work of the church's mission to make disciples.

[26 : 18] This means that you may be led into other types of ministry work. But what is the mission of the church? Now, we have decided as a church to be about the work of church planting because we know at some level, we've known this, this is not new information for most of you, that the mission of the church is to make disciples.

After all, the church is not merely an evangelistic outreach or a place for therapeutic lessons or a lecture or concert series. The church is not only meant to be your social network, although it's good that you know people here and you're networking together, but it's not just that.

The church is not a theological club where it affirms your reading of the Bible and you feel better about yourself because we're all on the same page theologically, which is a good thing to be on the same page theologically, but that's not why it exists primarily.

The church has a mission and the mission of the church has a guaranteed outcome because it's empowered by Christ who has all authority and will be with us always.

Turn back a couple of pages in the Gospel of Matthew to Matthew chapter 16. I'll begin reading in verse 13. Jesus came along with his disciples into the district of Caesarea Philippi.

[27 : 50] He asked those disciples, who do people say that the Son of Man is? The reason I went to Daniel chapter 7 was because I think that the backdrop of Matthew 28 has Matthew 16 in mind where Jesus asked this question, who do people say that the Son of Man is?

And they said, some say John the Baptist, others say Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets. They've misunderstood that old text.

Jesus says to them, but who do you say that I am? And one of the rare instances that Peter speaks up, he gets it right. Verse 16, Simon Peter replied, you are the Christ, the Son of the living God. What a revelatory moment. You are the Christ. You're the promised one, the deliverer, the Son of the living God. And Jesus answered him, blessed are you, Simon Barjona, for flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven.

This is grace that you would understand and recognize this. And I tell you, you are Peter and on this rock, not Peter, but on the truth that he's just proclaimed, on that rock, I will build my church.

[29 : 15] That phrase is significant. Jesus will build his church. We are secondary means as we go through the effort of making disciples. Secondary. He is primary.

We are secondary. I will build my church and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. I don't know how I missed in my Christian living the significance of the last part of verse 18.

I don't know how in my thinking I've constantly thought of the church as on the defense in a hostile culture. In this culture, this tide of soft totalitarianism, I don't know how because it's so very clear right here in the text.

And praise God for the day that I went, wait, hell is in the defensive position and the church is on the advance. Praise God. And we don't do it on our own.

It's because Jesus goes with us and he has all authority. It is guaranteed. He's going to build the church and the church is going to knock down the gates of hell. And look how, look how the church does it.

[30 : 19] Verse 19. Don't miss this. Verse 19. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven. And whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.

There's an extended authority given to the church to make disciples. If you jump a couple of chapters later to Matthew chapter 18, we see the process for church discipline. Right?

Carefully correcting those who claim to be in Christ. Helping them to repent and believe. And if they're unwilling to repent and believe, to see them out of the church. And it's right after that text that again this phrase is repeated.

To you has been given the keys of the kingdom of heaven. Right? We have a mission and it's guaranteed and Christ accompanies us in it and he's given us an authority to make disciples that he has promised to empower.

If we are not crystal clear on why we exist, then we will always be distracted by some lesser purpose. Something maybe you need to be involved with, but perhaps the church doesn't.

[31 : 29] We will need, as a church, to stay the course against the tide of soft totalitarianism by recognizing and reminding one another that the church has a mission to make disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ by the power that belongs to the Lord Jesus Christ.

Christ. And beloved, this will take sacrifice on our behalf. It won't be easy. We are not called to a peacetime mentality, but to a wartime mentality.

Right? Our weapons are love and hospitality and the word boldly spoken. It's going to take sacrifice, but the reward will be great.

It's worth it. It's worth every ounce of sacrifice. Anything that we could give in this life is going to be worth the Christ we will gain for eternity. Thomas Brooks wants to, this is on your bulletin, Christ dwells in that heart most imminently that hath emptied itself of itself.

Let's pray together.