

Building a Resilient Church Culture: Part 2 Remix – Clear Mission

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[0:00] We invite you to take your copy of God's Word and turn with me to Matthew chapter 28.! We had purpose today to get back into our study of Romans, and I must tell you that I'm very eager to continue considering and learning from verses 16 and 17 of chapter 1.

At this rate, we'll finish Romans about the time I retire as a pastor. I do hope we'll be able to get in it and keep up a pace here very soon.

But this evening, we have an important members meeting to pray and discuss the future of our church. You see, God has been blessing us with growth.

Good, healthy, steady growth. And we feel it on a lot of Sundays, not every Sunday, because there's just been so much sickness as of late.

But when you really begin to pay attention and look at the numbers, we have a wonderful opportunity in front of us, and we're going to have to think together.

[1:08] We're going to need to make some changes to the way that we meet if we are to stay on mission as a church. So, as I have spent time working on a sermon for today, I have felt that the most important thing happening today is the work we will do together this evening, which is why I want to prime us for that meeting.

Now, if you're a guest this morning, whether a new guest or a long-time guest, I don't believe this lesson will be lost on you, so don't already check out on us.

In fact, perhaps it will help inform your church involvement. So, I pray that this will be of good benefit for us all. I'm revisiting this morning a sermon that I preached about six months ago when we were going through that resilient church culture kind of series that we were working through on the mission of the church.

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.

I think that we are God's people and we care about his word, but there's a lot of lesser purposes that can distract us from the purpose of the church.

[2:33] We will need to readily identify what battles we ought to engage in and what the war is that we cannot avoid. We must know the task the Lord has set before us if we are to make decisions both macro and micro that honor him.

So, we're going to look today at Matthew chapter 28, verse 18, 19, and 20. A text that perhaps is familiar to you.

Maybe you've never heard it and thought about it in the context of a local church. Before I read it, beloved, let me remind you that this is God's word to us written for his glory and our good.

And so, we should listen to it so that we would believe its promises and that we would obey its commands. Matthew 28, verse 18 and following. And Jesus came and said to them, All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.

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

[3:50] And behold, I'm with you always to the end of the age. Now, in considering this text, we must first consider the amazing Christological statement that Jesus makes concerning himself in verse 18.

He says there that all authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Let us not rush past this to the application, but stop for a moment to steep in this reality.

Jesus is totally in charge. There's not an ounce of anything that happens in this world that our Lord does not reign over.

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 paid the penalty for our sin. A debt that with all our penitence we could not have repaid.

[5:04] And he has risen from the grave, defeating death, guaranteeing that for those who place saving faith in his person and his work, we will one day be resurrected.

It is on the heels of this that Jesus says, All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Now, it takes a little imagination to think, What must have the disciples thought at this point?

Where do our minds go if the risen Christ is before us and says, All authority in heaven and on earth, this leaves nothing out, has been given to me.

And I just imagine it's where my mind goes. Maybe it's where their minds went. To a text like Daniel chapter 7, verse 13 and 14.

Where Daniel records, I saw in the night visions and behold, with the clouds of heaven there came one like a son of man. And he came to the ancient of days and was presented before him.

[6:11] 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. Right? This, who we understand to be the Christ, the son of man, is given all the dominion so that peoples, nations and languages would serve him. Right? In his kingdom forever and ever. If their minds happened to go to a text like this, then Jesus' following command would not have been a surprise to them.

He has a reign that is going to include peoples, nations and languages. So it makes sense that he says, Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations.

Or in the Greek, ethnos. Go, therefore, in response to what I have just told you of my authority. Go, right? Because I am in charge of all things.

[7:22] Go. And this Greek word for go, which I won't try to pronounce this morning, means in the simplest of terms to go or to travel.

This is why this text is most classically used as a missionary text. And it certainly is that. As it speaks of all nations.

Right? It is a missionary text, but not just a missionary text. As a brief side note, I argue that this is a reference to peoples, not nation states.

It's a much more inclusive statement. Right? So it's a missionary text, but not just a missionary text. You see, this Greek word go is in the errorist verb tense.

In this case, not indicating a particular moment of going. It's in the passive grammatical voice, which means the subject implied in this case as you is being acted upon.

[8:31] So a fair translation of go could be in your God-ordained going about. In all of your going in which the Jesus who reigns over all things sends you, be about the work of making disciples.

So it is a missionary text because there are going to be people who go to the very ends of the earth. But it is also a text for us today. Jesus gives us a command to make disciples in our God-ordained going about, which 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 are 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.

He includes us in his mission on the earth because he loves us. And he knows that including us in his purpose grants us him as we see him work mightily in our disciple-making efforts.

This is not delegated authority. He doesn't give us authority. Jesus has the authority.

[10:00] We have a command. But because Jesus has the authority, it is an empowered command. And he does not want us to miss this.

Which is why the text is bookended. At the end of verse 20, he says, And behold, 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. This ought to embolden the listener to Jesus' words.

I have the authority. I will empower you. So, in your going about, as I've ordered it, be about the work of making disciples.

We have nothing to fear. For if God is for us, who can be against us? As Charles Spurgeon once said, Half our fears arise from neglect of the Bible.

[11:08] Often Christians focus their minds on the going and forget who has all the authority and who goes with us.

So, Jesus gives us a command to go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations and a promise to empower the work with his authority. But what are the means for this disciple making?

Perhaps you've gathered where I'm 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. Here, in the simplest of terms, to make disciples. Now, how do I arrive at that from this text?

I want you to see these three verses as highly ecclesiological. If I can get there, because I see two activities in our disciple making.

[12:17] The first one we see is baptizing. So we're to make disciples, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

Now, Bobby Jameson, in his book, Understanding Baptism, defined baptism this way. 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.

It's the believer's act of declaring that they're in Christ. They identify with Christ and his people and the church's act of affirming that they believe that profession is credible.

It's one of the ordinances we get from the Latin to put in order. It's the ordinance by which we welcome people into the church. Now, we don't have time to prove this definition out.

I think that book's out in the book nook if you'd like to pick it up. I'll be happy to put it in your hand.

But we believe as a church that baptizing individuals in the name of the triune God is what marks them off, is what welcomes them into the life of a local church.

[13:52] Normatively, churches baptize. There's all kinds of erroneous practice of baptism in our culture. But 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 the normative pattern that we see in the scripture.

People become Christians and they're baptized by a church into the life of a church. Therefore, it is an extremely fair assumption that Jesus means for us to understand that in our God-ordained going about and making disciples, we will be doing this connected to a church.

It's right there in the text. It's glaring at us as he says, make disciples, baptizing them in the name of the triune God. The second activity that I see is teaching.

Teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. the church is given the ongoing work of teaching the ways of Jesus.

[15:09] Let me show you this from an additional text. If you'd like to turn there, this is Ephesians chapter 4 verses 11 and following down through 16.

There we read, and he, referring to Christ, gave the apostles, the prophets, which you've probably heard me argue, I think is the scripture of our day.

He gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherd teachers to equip the saints for the work of ministry. So there's, there's the task of the leadership of your church is the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry.

What is that work of ministry? Last part of verse 12, for building up the body of Christ 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 in deceitful schemes.

Boy, does the church lack this kind of equipping. The church in our day is so wind blown. Rather, verse 15, speaking the truth in love.

[16:32] There's the teaching ministry of the church. Speaking the truth in love. We are to grow up in every way into him who is the head into Christ from whom the whole body joined and held together by 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. This work that Paul describes here will not be over until Christ returns. This is the age in which we live that Jesus accompanies us on with all of his authority.

We need to be taught and taught and taught to observe all that Jesus has commanded us. He is not suggesting that we have a simple course.

Someone's converted, baptized, and they take the Christianity 101 course and it's done. What he's talking about in Matthew chapter 28 is the life of discipling that happens in a church.

church. I am building a house. Many of you know I'm building a house property. I'm building quite physically with my hands a house for my parents.

[17:49] This task will not be completed until the house is completed. We have that CO and probably beyond that I'll still have some projects to do. I cannot merely break ground on the job site and say that I have built a house.

It's not built yet. We took a step in the right direction. One of thousands of steps but it's not built yet. I'm in the process of building a house.

We will not be done until Ephesians 4 verse 13. 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.

Now I want to take a step away from our text just for a bit to consider this further. Jonathan Lehman, the editorial director for Nine Marks, has characterized in numerous publications, most recently in a little book entitled What is the Church's Mission?

I don't think this one is out there but there's quite a few of this series out in the book nook. But in this What is the Church's Mission book, he talks about five different types of churches, each with a different mission.

[19:08] And I think it's helpful to us. So the first four are erroneous missions. And I think we need to be careful as a church that we don't get tempted to begin to think in some of these ways.

So let me read to you a brief excerpt from this book. So again, he's going through five. My reading starts, Church one emphasizes the Great Commission and Jesus' command to make disciples.

Yet when they say make disciples, they really 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.

And he means only 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.

[20:20] 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 when you 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.

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

Church number three we can call Justice Church. Join them on Sunday when you 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.

[21:31] 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 Phariseism, meaning they lay down laws and political certainties where Scripture doesn't. Members leave church on Sunday not so much thanking God for His grace in their lives, but feeling superior to other people because of their moral and political convictions.

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.

[22:52] When churches are driven, their playbooks, their sense of their mission easily succumb to biblical imbalances and worldly agendas. Seekers' church shows 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.

So, seekers, prosperity, justice, righteous nation, church. But 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.

First, he asks, what is the mission of the church acting all together, and what is the mission of church members throughout the week when we're not gathered together, or what is our mission and what is your mission?

He then answers these questions simply and I believe correctly by saying, number one, so what is our mission acting together as a church? Our mission is to make disciples.

Number two, living as individual church members throughout the week, our mission is to be disciples. 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.

[24:34] we do so by the prescription of the Bible. This is called the regulative principle. 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 or planting new churches or starting a school, but the efforts of the church acting together must always be aimed at going therefore and making disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that Jesus has commanded us.

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.

Disciples of Jesus will be rightly concerned with seeing others become disciples of Jesus. You've heard me sum up much of what I've just said by saying the church gathers to go, bring you here, equip you to send you, and we go in order to gather, continue to gather the church together.

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.

[26:18] The church is not a theological club. The church is not a thing to be consumed. And beloved, hear me, it's altogether possible to consume a church that's not trying to offer consumables.

What you might be consuming is small church or relationship or expositional preaching or wordy songs or the list can go on and on and on.

The church is a people called by God and given a divine mission with a guaranteed outcome. Jesus has all authority in heaven and earth.

Go therefore and make disciples, baptizing them and teaching them all that I've commanded you.

Another text that I want to show you that drives at this point is from Matthew chapter 16.

So do please join me in Matthew chapter 16 beginning in verse 13. We'll close with this text and a few comments about it.

[27:31] Jesus is traveling with the disciples and when he comes as verse 13 to the district of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, 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. He said to them, but who do you say that I am?

Simon Peter replied, you are the Christ, 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.

And I tell you, you are Peter and on this rock, and maybe clear, he's referring to the truth that Peter has declared doing some play on word there, but he's referring to the truth that Peter has declared that he is the Christ on that rock.

Jesus says, I will build my church. Right? This Jesus all authority in heaven on earth who's going to accompany us in this disciple-making process of building churches says, I will build my church.

[28:46] He is primary means, we are secondary means. And then he says, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. If you've been here, you've heard me say this, my mind flipped this text for years, for years.

I don't know why, the text is really plain, but I had the church in the defensive position, right?

Holding at bay the world. It's very clearly not that, right?

It's very clearly the church is on the advance. Hell is in the defensive position, and the gates of hell will not prevail against it.

Jesus is talking about his global church, his church everywhere and across all time here, and I want to be very careful at this point to say, the gates of hell can prevail against this church.

It will not prevail against the church. Boy, I want to be part of that church, right? I want to be included in that number that take the gates of hell for the glory of Christ.

[29:58] If we are not crystal clear on why we exist, then we will always be distracted, by some lesser purpose. We will need to recognize and remind 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.

We will have to be readily reminded of this as we are slow learners and quick to forget. This coming year and the years beyond it will be a great test of our collective understanding of the mission of the church.

I can promise you that it will not be easy. If you're a member of this church, I just want you to wad up all the comfort that you have right now and throw it out the window.

It's not going to be easy. That is not the point. It's going to take sacrifice on our behalf. but the reward will be great because we will experience God as he empowers the mission that he has given us.

I can close with a quote from Thomas Brooks. He once wrote, Christ dwells in that heart most imminently that hath emptied itself of itself.

[31:19] May this be true of us. Let's pray to that end. Let's pray.