

The Continuing Mission of the Church **Matthew 28:16-20**

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Between 1966 and 1969, for 79 episodes viewers heard this now-familiar introduction: Space, the final frontier. These are the voyages of the starship Enterprise. Its five-year mission: to explore strange new worlds. To seek out new life and new civilizations. To boldly go where no man has gone before.” Can you hear the theme song in your head? Well, the original series didn’t make it five years. It was canceled after three.

But in 1987 a new series, Star Trek: The Next Generation began. It had a similar introduction with one change. Instead of a five-year mission, the intro now said: Its continuing mission...

A mission is an important reference point for any organization and arguably any life. A mission states the purpose for the organization’s existence. It clarifies what the group is supposed to do. The church has a mission. It was given to us directly by Jesus.

What is the expiration date for the mission of the church? Jesus said it was the end of the age. In other words, our mission will be complete when Jesus wraps history into eternity at his return. Until then, we have a continuing mission.

Today we are going to unpack four factors of the continuing mission of the church. The continuing mission of the church is entrusted to imperfect disciples, enabled by Jesus’s universal Lordship, engaged in making disciples, and empowered by Jesus’s presence.

I. Entrusted to imperfect disciples (vv. 16-17).

- A. The eleven meet Jesus at a mountain he selected.
- B. They respond to Jesus with a mixture of faith and doubt.
 - 1. The term “doubted” comes from a word that means “to waver, to hesitate, to be uncertain.”
 - 2. This term is used in Matt. 14:31 when Jesus addresses Peter after he started to sink when walking on the water. It isn’t that Peter had no faith. It was wavering faith, hesitant faith.
 - 3. One writer said, Matthew understands that the fluctuation between worship and indecision is every disciple’s struggle.”

We have a tendency to idealize the disciples of Jesus. We view them as more than normal people. We think of them as spiritual superheroes who are sort of like us but have special powers. The fact that even after the resurrection these disciples have wavering faith reminds us that they are like us.

Jesus did not entrust the mission of his church to superhero disciples but imperfect disciples. All of us are imperfect disciples. We will be imperfect, struggling disciples until the day we die or Jesus comes to get us.

This recognition does two things for us. **First, it encourages us.** We can be part of the mission. We don’t have to achieve platinum status as disciples to be part of the mission. If you are a

disciple, you are part of the mission, imperfect as you are. **Second, it makes us accountable.** You cannot hide behind the excuse that you are not advanced enough to be part of the mission. God entrusted his mission to imperfect disciples, not elite disciples.

Jesus includes people like you and me in his mission. Don't hide from it. Lean into it.

II. Enabled by Jesus's universal Lordship (v. 18).

A. Jesus claims universal authority.

1. All authority in heaven and on earth. That is comprehensive. That is universal. Not some authority in some places. All authority in all places. That is a huge claim. Why does Jesus possess all authority in heaven and on earth?

B. The universal authority of Jesus is the result of his resurrection/exaltation.

1. The resurrection of Jesus vindicated his claims to be the Son of God, the forgiver of sin, the conqueror of death, and the promised King.
2. This authority is pictured in Daniel 7:13-14.
3. Jesus is the risen and enthroned King whose authority encompasses the universe.

C. Jesus sends his disciples based on his authority (therefore, go).

1. The mission of the church is enabled by Jesus's authority. He send the church into the world because he is Lord over everything.
2. His authority is what gives his disciples the right to go and proclaim the good news to everyone everywhere.

Jurisdiction is the power to exercise authority over persons and things within a territory. For example, the maximum posted speed limit in KS is 75. In Missouri, it is 70. If you are motoring along in KS and cross over into MO and you get stopped for doing 75, you might argue, "but KS said it was ok for me to drive 75." MO doesn't care because KS doesn't have jurisdiction over MO. The power for KS to exercise authority over how fast you drive ends at the KS border.

Where does the jurisdiction of Jesus end? It doesn't. Jesus tells his disciples to go into all the world and make disciples because there is no end to his jurisdiction. All authority belongs to him. In KS, in MO, in Kazakhstan and in Morocco, from Austria to Zambia, in heaven and on earth.

As one author put it, "universal lordship means universal mission." When you go across the room, across the street, or across the world to tell others the good news of Jesus, you go as his ambassador, under his authority.

The continuing mission of the church is enabled by Jesus's authority. But what exactly does this mission involve?

III. Engaged in making disciples (vv. 19-20a).

A. Jesus sends his disciples to make disciples of all nations.

1. Grammatically, the focal point of the passage is on the command to make disciples. It is the primary verb. The mission of the church is to make disciples.

2. This command raises two questions.
 - a. What is a disciple?
 1. The basic meaning is a learner or follower. A disciple attaches their life to someone as a learner and follower.
 2. Disciples are those who have trusted in Jesus and identified their lives with him. They are those who obey Jesus's teaching. They are those whose lives demonstrate the character of Christ (bear fruit).
 3. Disciples are united to Jesus by faith and their lives are being shaped by surrender to the Lordship of Jesus in every area.
 - b. How are disciples made?
 1. Note first that the goal of the mission is not conversion but discipleship. Conversion is the first step of discipleship.
 2. Jesus mentions two things that are essential to discipleship.
 - a. Baptism – this is the public identification of a person with Jesus. It is declaring to the world that you have trusted in Jesus and you are following him.

Commenting on what it means to be baptized in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, one writer said, *Matthew intends a comprehensive commitment, together, to Jesus and what he has brought and done and stands for. Loyalty, belonging to, submission to, and intention to act on behalf of may all be involved.* To be baptized is to publicly declare your commitment to Jesus.

- b. Teaching to observe all Jesus commanded – this is the ongoing process of teaching and obeying. The church teaches not just to impart information but to spark the transformation of lives to obedience to Jesus.

Kyle Idleman provides a helpful distinction that gets to the core of discipleship. He compares the idea of being a fan of Jesus with being a follower of Jesus. Jesus is not looking for fans. He is looking for followers. He probes into this idea in this paragraph.

“Fans don’t mind him doing a little touch-up work, but Jesus wants complete renovation. Fans come to Jesus thinking tune-up, but Jesus is thinking overhaul. Fans think a little makeup is fine, but Jesus is thinking makeover. Fans think a little decorating is required, but Jesus wants a complete remodel. Fans want Jesus to inspire them, but Jesus wants to interfere with their lives.”

To obey everything Jesus commanded is to submit your life to his lordship in every area. It doesn’t say obey the teachings of Jesus you prefer. It is complete surrender to Jesus’s commands. Clearly this is a process. We have to learn what Jesus commands so we can obey him. But the posture of a disciples is to say “I will obey” even when you are still learning what to obey.

May I ask you today, are you a disciple of Jesus? Jesus died on the cross for our sins. Jesus rose from the dead as the conqueror of sin and death. He promises the gift of eternal life to all who trust in him? He invites you today to turn from your sin and trust in him for his forgiveness. Have you committed to following Jesus?

In a nutshell, our mission is to proclaim the gospel so people will believe in Jesus, baptize them as an open declaration of their commitment to Jesus, and then train them to follow Jesus in every area of life. We need to start where we live and move out from there into all people groups.

How are you doing? Are you leveraging your presence in your workplace to make disciples? Are you praying for your neighbors and looking for opportunities to share Jesus with them? Are you actively engaged in helping someone else follow Jesus?

We need to be reminded often that our continuing mission is to make disciples. But Jesus did not drop this mission on his disciples and then disappear. Notice that...

IV. Empowered by Jesus's presence (v. 20 b).

A. Jesus promises to be with his disciples.

1. I will be with you always. But how? Isn't Jesus soon to ascend to heaven and leave the earth? How is Jesus going to be with them?
2. Jesus's ongoing presence with the church is through the Holy Spirit.
 - a. In John 13-17 Jesus went into detail about how he was going away in terms of his physical presence. However, he promised not to leave his disciples as orphans. He would send the Holy Spirit to be with them and even in them to guide, comfort, and empower them.
 - b. Acts 1:8 reports that before he ascended, Jesus reminded his disciples that they would receive power when the Holy Spirit descended upon them and they would be his witnesses around the world.

B. He will be with them until the end of the age.

1. How long will Jesus be present with his church to empower their mission?
2. Until the end of the age. Until he comes again in glory and power to finally judge sin and establish his kingdom.
3. This indicates that Jesus knew this mission would extend beyond those original eleven to include us.

As you seek to make disciples, you do not do it alone. You cannot do it alone. Jesus is with you. His Spirit gives you the power you need to engage others with the good news. His Spirit guides you in developing relationships and having conversations about Jesus. His Spirit encourages you when making disciples is hard.

Conclusion

Here is a mission statement from a well-known institution of higher learning. "To be plainly instructed and consider well that the main end of your life and studies is to know God and Jesus Christ." You may be thinking, "Wow, that must be one of our seminaries or maybe Wheaton College." No. It is Harvard. Harvard was founded in 1636 to train pastors. It drifted from its mission.

We are talking about reference points in this series. This passage is an important reference point because of mission drift. Mission drift is when an organization begins to forget its purpose and it drifts into doing other things that are peripheral to its original founding intent. The mission of the church, given to her by Jesus, is to make disciples.

If you are a disciple, you are part of this mission. Our continuing mission is to make disciples. Our universally authoritative Lord is with us. By his power and with his presence, let's engage in making disciples.