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**Teaching: Carlon Tschetter**  
**Series: People on a Mission**  
**Message: People on a Mission**

**Transcribed Message**  
**August 18, 2019**  
**Matthew 28**

One of my favorite memories from my teenage years was coming home from church Sunday evening and doing whatever it is that we needed to do before the 9 o'clock hour. At 9 o'clock Mission Impossible came on. Not the Tom Cruise Mission Impossible with those four movies. We're talking here about Jim Phelps. 168 episodes. We're talking about the real Mission Impossible. If you are old enough to remember that, you'll remember that at the beginning of every show Mr. Phelps would get an envelope. In that envelope would be information and often times pictures that he'd be looking through with regard to the assignment that he was going to be given. There was a tape recorder in there as well. He would sit down oftentimes in some public place and he would turn his tape recorder on and it would tell them about the perilous mission that was going to be unfolding before him. It was always a dangerous one. Always one that if he failed it was going to be disaster for a whole bunch of people. Always one in which the voice on the tape said if you are caught in the course of this mission, the secretary, I guess the Secretary of State, is going to disavow that he knows anything about you or what you're doing or where you're from. Then the voice would say at the very end, this tape will self-destruct in five seconds. In five seconds, there would be a puff of smoke that would come up and the tape would be destroyed and they'd be off and going. What we learned 168 times is that the mission was not really impossible at all. With some human ingenuity and technical sophistication and some hard work and effort, they always seemed to pull off the mission and it no longer turned out to be impossible after all.

Well, this morning we're going to be looking at something that is a mission that is impossible apart from God's work. This morning, let's look at the fact that there is eternal significance in every aspect of our lives. We are going to live our lives as sent ones to a world that desperately needs Christ. I've been gone for a couple of weeks

studying and vacationing and relaxing and I get back home and of course there's the manila envelope on my desk. It lays out the mission for this fall. Every fall at this time, we take a few Sundays and we just refocus our efforts and our attention. A couple of years ago we did People of the Book. We looked at how this book, the Word of God, undergirds and directs every area of our life. Last year we took on, what happened to not be just a little mini-series but a whole series, and it was the People of the Spirit. This year we want to look at this matter of being People on a Mission and then we'll jump back in to Proverbs sometime in the middle of September.

What we're looking at this morning is a truly impossible mission. Mission possible as it almost always turned out to be. Mission Impossible always turned out to be mission possible. But ours isn't that way. No amount of human ingenuity or human potential is going to intervene and make the mission that we've been given possible apart from the help of God. Because you see, here's our deal. The problem that we are facing and dealing with is the problem of sin. The Bible describes the problem of sin as something that has taken place in our world and our world is broken because of it. Someone described it as cosmic treason against God. That's what it truly is. Here we are as the creatures telling the Creator what it is that we will and will not do. The Bible refers to that as sin. The Bible tells us further that everyone of us has sinned. All have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. The effects of this problem are fatal. They're fatal in all of our lives. Sin by its very definition separates. The very essence of what death is is a separation. In this case, the separation from God in time is a spiritual separation that takes place in this fatal impact of sin on our lives. The degree of difficulty as we have said is that this is utterly impossible. No amount of human cleverness, no spiritual gizmos, no disguises are going to work to bring about a solution to this problem that the Bible describes in the ways that we have just mentioned. We can't heal the wrong. We can't bring the breach together. Left to ourselves we will find that there is no way back.

But thankfully, the amazing truth is that God has made a provision for us. He has chosen us. Now He has chosen us, Paul says in Ephesians 1, for this very incredible gift of salvation itself. But then having chosen us for salvation, He has chosen us to be a part of this mission that He has entrusted to us. The apostle Paul writes about it in 2 Corinthians chapter 5 and verse 18. This is what Paul says: "All this is from God, who

through Christ reconciled us to Himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to Himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation. Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making His appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. For our sake He made Him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God.” Everybody who has trusted Christ as their personal Savior and has experienced this rescue from this fatal problem of sin, who has been delivered from this death sentence that sin brings into our life. Everybody has been placed on this mission. This mission that Paul just described in 2 Corinthians 5. It's been entrusted to every one of us.

The Latin word for mission is *missio*. It means sent ones. We are collectively as the people of God sent ones. John Stott is the one who said missions is the global outreach of a global people of a global God. The global outreach of a global people of a global God. I would ask that we stop at that point and that we ask a question in light of that statement. The question we put to that is how do we know that's true? Why do we think that's true? Why is it right to talk about a global mission with a global people engaged in that mission because of a global God? Where does such an idea come from? I would like for us to answer that question in the best way that we ever can, and that is to answer the question by saying what does the Bible say about that? Does the Bible have anything to say about that?

Let's look at that this morning. The mission of God. One of the things we like to do at Covenant is to take a look at the Bible and work our way through it. We like to study or go all the way through the book. That's what we're doing with Proverbs right now. One of the things that's sometimes good to do is to step out of a book study and go up about 40,000 feet and fly really high. We get a good look at the big picture of what is in the 66 books that we call our Bible. While it's great to go deep and mine through the truth of one book, sometimes we can lose perspective of the fact that all 66 of these books are true. All of them are directing us to a similar story. That's what I want to do this morning. I want us to look at God's plan and God's story. As I said, Bonnie and I have been gone for a couple weeks. We've been reading, studying, relaxing. I've got two weeks of messages built up inside me and so I want to go from Genesis to

Revelation this morning. I want to show you that there is a Biblical basis for this idea that there's a global mission on the part of the global people because God is a God who has the world on His heart. We're going to do a sweep of the whole Bible and we're going to see what this looks like. If we're going to do that, then where do we start? We go to the first book of the Bible.

We go to the book of Genesis and as you go to the book of Genesis, let me just give you a little bit of a sweep to get us to the place where we're going to start off and that is in Genesis 1 and 2. We have God created the heavens and the earth. In chapters 3 and 4 something terrible happens. Adam and Eve disobeyed God. This good God that we've just sung about. They've decided that they've got a better way of doing things than He had in mind and so they fall into sin. In Genesis 5 through 9, we have this cataclysmic flood that sweeps over the entire earth as God brings judgment. Then in chapters 10 and 11, the people come together at the Tower of Babel and they decide again that they're going to go against the very thing that God has said that they are to do, which is to scatter and multiply themselves over all the earth. So they were all in one place to build a tower all the way up to heaven and they're going to encounter God there. Then you come after Chapter 11 to what? You come to chapter 12. Let's go there.

In Genesis chapter 12, we are introduced to a man named Abram. He's going to have his name changed to as we know it as Abraham. But look at the first three verses of Genesis chapter 12: "Now the Lord said to Abram, 'Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.'" What's happening in Genesis 12 is that God finds a man named Abram living in the land of Ur of the Chaldeans. A Gentile man and God chooses this man and He says Abraham, from you I am going to create, I'm going to bring about the nation of Israel. The Jewish people are going to be your descendants. So the nation of Israel was born. We know that Abraham had many sons. Many sons had father Abraham. I am one of them and so are you. so let's just praise the Lord. And then you sing that about eight times, right? That is what happened here in

Genesis 12. The nation of Israel is born. God promises to this man named Abram/Abraham that He is going to create from him a name for Himself, that is God is, who is going to bring fame and glory to God through all that is going to transpire through Abraham's descendants. God is going to redeem a people through this man.

Now go over to Genesis chapter 22 and verse 18. See how fast we're going? We've only got 1167 chapters to go. So now we're in Genesis 22 and in Genesis 22 verse 18 it says this: "and in your offspring shall all the nations of the earth be blessed because you have obeyed My voice." We can read that verse and go right by it pretty quickly and overlook the fact that He says there "and in your offspring all the nations." This is a reoccurring word. As you read your Bible, it is surprising how many times the word "nations" appears in both the Old and the New Testament. But I want you to see here is the fact that he speaks of the offspring (singular) and that's what this word is in the Hebrew. We don't notice that in the English but in the Hebrew this word is in the singular. And we say so what? Somebody knew what that meant because a couple of thousand years later in Galatians chapter 3 and verse 16 listen to what the apostle Paul says: "It does not say, 'And to offsprings,' referring to many, but referring to one. 'And to your offspring,' who is Christ." God's promise to Abram was that through him He was going to bring a people that were going to be on a global mission to reach the world for Christ. It was going to be through this offspring, this one, this singular who is Christ. The blessing that is going to come through Abraham and to the nations is ultimately going to come because of Christ.

Now the rest of the Old Testament is the unfolding of the story. From Genesis 12 God commissions and promises to Abraham this unfolding of this blessing. We're flying at 40,000 feet and the rest of the Old Testament is basically an outworking of this story. How is it that Israel is doing? How are they doing in taking this blessing as ultimately going to come through this singular offspring of Christ who is going to bring redemption and salvation to the world? As you read through the Old Testament, you know a lot of times they didn't do very well, did they? That's the unfolding story of God's people. A lot of times they failed to do the very mission that God had given for them to do. They were to be a light to the nations. Very often God had to use the other nations to bring discipline into their life to bring them back on mission.

One book of the Old Testament just is a snapshot. The little book of Jonah. We looked at it a couple of years ago. It's a perfect example of this very thing. God says Jonah, you're a prophet. I want you to take the gospel if you will and I want you to take it to Nineveh. I want you to take to the Gentiles. Remember Jonah says, no way. I don't want to do that. I don't like those people. I don't like them at all. I hate them. I don't want to take the gospel to them. And, in fact, he goes the other way, doesn't he? Well, God uses that as an illustration for what is happening in the nation itself. They were off mission. They had forgotten the very purpose of God's calling on their life. So we see in the Old Testament that instead of being a light to the world, the world often overcame His people.

Paul says in 1 Corinthians chapter 10 and in Romans 15 that these very things in the Old Testament are written for our instruction. They're written for our learning. They are examples to us. In what ways are they examples to us? They're examples to us because they're a snapshot of us very often. We read through the Old Testament and we wonder how those people could do those things. How could they wander that far away from God? How could they be so ungrateful? How can they be so off mission? Then we hold up the Word of God and we realize this is a mirror of who we often are. So there you have the Old Testament.

Now we come to the New Testament and we come to the gospel of Matthew. Let's look secondly at the gospel of Matthew in chapter 28. If you're very familiar to church for very long you know Matthew 28 is the favorite missionary passage. It is often called the Great Commission. Here we have what is often stated as being our mission that God gave way back to Abraham in Genesis 12. Beginning at verse 18 we read this: "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. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.'" The mission is right there. It's abundantly clear. Make disciples of all the nations. There's that word again. Nations. Here in the Greek it is *ethne*. What do you think we get from that word? We get the word "ethnic". Ethnicity. So take the gospel to every ethnicity. Take the gospel to all of the different people groups. Go and make disciples of every group of

people that inhabit the world. That was the Great Commission at the end of Matthew's gospel right before Jesus was to ascend up into heaven. He had been with these disciples now for some three years.

They received this commission. They received this mission. How did they do? How did they do? This little band of 12 became a band of 120, then became 500, that on the day of Pentecost exploded into thousands. How did they do? When you look back at church history and you realize that this band of Christ followers, having received this mission assignment to go and make disciples of all the nations, what did they do? By the 3rd century many would say Constantine did the church a great disservice, but Constantine the Emperor of Rome actually made Christianity the state religion. It probably was a great disfavor that he did but the point is this. In those early years against incredible opposition and great persecution, many of those Roman emperors looked upon Christians as a scapegoat to pour out all of the vengeance of Rome upon, and yet they prevailed. Do you know why they prevailed? Because the gospel is the power of God unto salvation. This small group of people could not be stopped because they had in their possession this assignment and this mission that involved the gospel. Paul said we're not ashamed of the gospel of Christ and we're not ashamed of it because it ultimately is the only thing that brings deliverance from this death sentence that we find ourselves in.

So let's go to one final scene and we go to the back of our Bibles and we go to the book of Revelation. We go to Revelation chapter 7. In Revelation chapter 7 what do we find? We find this incredible scene unfolding before us. Here you thought it couldn't be done. We started in Genesis and we're already now in Revelation. In verses 9 through 12, everything is over now. The mission is complete. Whoever got this assignment now while all of the work in that regard is done and beginning at verse 9: "After this I looked, and behold, a great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, with palm branches in their hands, and crying out with a loud voice, 'Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!' And all the angels were standing around the throne and around the elders and four living creatures, and they fell on their faces before the throne and worshiped God,

saying, 'Amen! Blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honor and power and might be to our God forever and ever! Amen'." You have this incredible scene unfolding before us. We get to just simply sit back and envision this mass gathering of people who are singing the praises of their Savior. People from every nation, from every people group, from every tribe, from every tongue. We have this glimpse into eternity in all of these people. It's going to look a lot different than it looks this morning because there's going to be people from every tribe, and every tongue, and every nation, right? I don't know what language we're going to be singing in, whether it will all be our own language and God puts it all together in one. Or we're going to be singing in a heavenly language. Who knows? But here they are and if you're a Christ follower, if you've put your trust in Christ, you're in this passage. You're in the Bible right here. You're a part of this mass gathering of those who have followed and committed themselves to Christ. You're part of the story. That's great and that's cool and we love that and what an incredible scene that we have before us. But here's the question. What is your part in the story?

So think with me then secondly of your part in the story. You're there. I'm there. We're in Revelation 7 having put our trust in Christ. But here's the question I want us to consider this morning. Who is there because of us? Who is there because of us? We're there because of somebody right? I'm there because of somebody. But the question for us then is who is there because of us? Martin Luther used to say there are two days. In his worldview, there were just two days. There was this day and that day. This day and that day. This day obviously referred to today. It refers to the present. It refers to actually what's happening on this August 18, 2019 day on this Sunday. What are we doing with this day? And that day, he used to say, that day when I'm going to give an answer to my Lord for what I did with all of these days. So he really brought a perspective that said I need to pay attention to what I'm doing this day because there's going to be a day when I'm going to give an account on that day for what I did. What I did with my time, what I did with my talents, what I did with all the resources that God entrusted to me, how I lived my life, how I fulfilled my part in God's mission. Did I understand the mission that God gave me to do? And if I did, what did I do with that?



So here's the point. What's important to God should be what? You fill it in. What's important to God should be what's important to us. What's important to God should be important to me. It's not my story. It is his story. It is not our story that we should be consumed with. It's His story that should dominate my thinking, my life, my words, my actions. His story transcends every other story. His story is the most important of all. You cannot find meaning and purpose in life in pursuit of your story. You can only find meaning and purpose in life when you engage and involve yourself in His story. How many people have tried to find meaning and purpose in life through their vocation, through marriage, through children or grandchildren, through riches and money and things and stuff? Every one of them has been tried and found wanting.

When we were on vacation, one of the things we did was we went to a library and we saw this Leonardo da Vinci exhibit. As is our custom, I did the whole exhibit in 15 minutes and two hours later Bonnie comes back out. Much of what I share I have to give her credit for. But I did get this much. The guy was an absolute amazing genius of a man. I don't know how many people would be on the mountaintop with him, but Leonardo da Vinci was absolutely sheer total genius based on what was in this exhibit. Obviously he was an artist and a painter – from Mona Lisa to the Last Supper. He was an inventor. Just name a topic. Anything that you can think of and the man did something in relation to about anything and everything that you can think of in life. Here is the point of it. On one of the display boards, it talked about the fact that even though he is like on the Mount Everest of humanity in terms of genius, one of the things that brought it all back down to earth was he struggled much of his life with wondering what was truly meaningful and what brought purpose. That's an amazing admission here in this secular display about Leonardo da Vinci that is exalting this man, and rightly so in many respects, but fundamentally when it was all said and done, he's trying to figure out what am I here for? What is this life mission about? He had given himself to all of these things and every one fell short in his understanding.

When we get off mission and when we get off of our understanding of what God has for us as His people to do, do you know what we do? We start going through the motions. We start just playing church. We start just going to church and doing church. We forget that what God wants is for us to be the church and to be on mission. When

we get our eyes off of the mission we become critics. We become consumers and we become spectators. We stop being disciple makers. Do you want to get excited? Find someone to share life with who is not where you are spiritually. Find somebody that is younger in their faith and that you can come alongside of and disciple and help them grow. They will invigorate you to want to take this mission that Jesus has given to us and go out and do it over and over and over again. There is eternal significance to every aspect of our lives. We are to live as sent ones into this world that desperately needs Christ.

So let me say a couple things in closing. What do we take away? First of all, some of us need to get serious about the Lordship of Christ. Some of us just need to get serious about what it means to be a follower of Christ. Some of us need to get serious about what Paul said in 2 Timothy about being caught up in the things of the world, being entangled in the things of the world. Some of us need to get serious about sin in our life. You're never going to get serious about the mission if you're living in bondage to sin and your treating it as if it's no big deal. It is a big deal. That's why Jesus came. That's why He died and that's why He brought deliverance and freedom that we wouldn't live in bondage to it any longer. Some of us need to get serious about what it means to live this day with that day in view in light of the Lordship of Christ in my life.

What does that look like? What does He want from me day to day? It's very easy in the church for us to think that the problem is always out there somewhere. The problem is very seldom out there as it relates to the power of the gospel and the mission that God has given. Here's the problem. It's right here. It's right in here. The problem is oftentimes us as the body of Christ, as the church. We lose sight of our mission. We get entangled in the affairs of the world. We fail to take and acknowledge fully the Lordship of Christ over every area of our life. We spend too much time living our story instead of living His story, thinking that there's something that is going to bring meaning and purpose to our life apart from the mission of God. It can't happen. That's not what we were designed for. We weren't designed for our story. We weren't designed to live out my story. We were designed to live out His story. Todd Wagner in the book *Come and See* says: "It's easy to grow cold and complacent right at this area". Right at this area so that we find ourselves doing church and going to church and just going through the

motions and we fail to engage in the mission that God has given. Is this not what Jesus was saying in Revelation 2 to the church at Laodicea? You've lost your passion. You're taking your eyes off of the mission that I've given you to do.

Secondly, ask God to help you see life as He does. Make this a daily prayer. I don't think that we ever get captivated by the mission of God apart from prayer and the work of the Holy Spirit. It just can't happen. We can't be passionate about the things of God unless it's something that we're asking God to be doing in our life and asking Him to give us eyes of faith to see what it is that He's doing, and asking the Holy Spirit to empower us and awaken us to the things that God wants to be doing in our life. To that end, there's on your pew seat somewhere a card that says "People on a Mission". If you don't have one, find one. Pass one around if you see somebody that doesn't have one. I would encourage you to take one or two or three of these. Put one on your mirror. Put one in your car. Put one in your Bible. Let's begin to ask God to give us this sense of mission as the people of God so that every day when we get up with the idea that we're living on mission, that we're living with a sense of purpose and a sense of meaning that goes far beyond my story and engages life at the very story that God has placed us here for.

Start by making that commitment to pray that God would open our heart to see these things, that He would open our hearts to see the eternal significance of every detail of our life, of every encounter that we have. That we would pray that He would show us how it is that He wants to use us and in that particular day. Here's my life. I'm available for you today. Every encounter that I have, I want to be on mission for you. every conversation that I have. I don't know where it's going to go. I want to be ready to be used by God. Every person that I meet. If I'm standing in line at Walmart or Target. If I'm pumping gas or if I'm encountering a coworker. Whatever it is, help me to think in terms of this moment as being one of eternal significance. Why shouldn't it be that way? Why can't it be that way? Every person we meet is an eternal bearer of the image of God. The courage to step out of our comfort zone. How many of your neighbors do you know by name? That's a good place to start.

How many of your neighbors do you know by name? Make that a prayer request. God, give me an opportunity. It doesn't matter if you've lived there for 10 years. Who

cares? Their life hangs in the balance between heaven and hell. You've got the gospel, the treasure. Make an effort to get to know each other in that sense. How many people that you work with know you're a person of faith? Maybe they haven't heard your personal stories and personal testimony, but do they know you're a person of faith? Do they know that there's something different about you? Do they see anything in your life that marks you as being different? This is what God has called us to do and to be. At the bottom of that card you can write down five names. If you need more than 5, write down 10. Think of people specifically in your circle of influence that you would long to have come to a personal understanding of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Start praying for them by name. start looking for those times when God can open the door. You can't do it by just living your life well. At some point you have to verbalize the gospel. At some point, you have to say something that is going to bring into their world and into their experience this gospel, this good news that we so treasure.

Then lastly, let's start sharing stories about what God is doing so that we encourage and spur one another on to love and good deeds. It doesn't have to be that my neighbor saw me in the driveway and came over and said I noticed your life is so incredibly different. How is it that I can be saved and have what you have? And then they put their trust in Christ right there in your driveway. It doesn't have to be that story. That's a great story. I love that story. But it doesn't have to be a story like that. It can be a simple encounter in which you just share the kindness and love of God with somebody. You're planting a seed or you're watering the seed that somebody else has planted. Those are the kinds of stories that we just need to commonly, regularly share with each other about how it is that God is opening our eyes to see the mission that He has all of us on and how it is that He's using us in that way.

I want to suggest to you again that every encounter you have is an encounter with eternal significance. The last day as we were driving home, we came out of the hotel eating area and I had already gone back to the room to get some things ready. Bonnie was leaving and she had on a particular backpack that she likes. It's a little unusual. There was a lady in a wheelchair and she had the exact same backpack. Bonnie just goes up and touches her on the shoulder, startles her, and she is with another couple. They began to have a conversation. The conversation was a very hard

one. Just in that brief moment, there in the breakfast nook of this hotel. It is simply because Bonnie saw a connection and just out of an act of kindness greeted this lady. What they were doing was this was a 37-year-old woman who has special needs. These were her parents and they were taking her to Illinois to have her placed in an institution where she was going to be cared for. It would have been really easy to have seen that backpack and not made any connection, not said anything just walked by. That's what we do almost every day in regular encounters. Bonnie just spoke with this family and told them she would be praying for them. Who knows what God will do with that?

That's the point of what the Spirit of God wants to do with a people who are on mission. It doesn't have to be standing on the street corner doing street evangelism. It is simply acts of kindness and acknowledging that God is the sovereign Lord of all of the details of life and He's working in all of these encounters all of the time. Frederick Faber said more people have been won to Christ through acts of kindness than anything else. It's as simple as that. If the people of God will understand the mission that they have been given is to be on a mission that is literally impossible apart from the Spirit of God and the gospel of God's grace, but with the gospel and with the Spirit of God and with a willing and obedient heart, God may very well use that encounter to bring to them an understanding of who Jesus is.

Let's pray. Father God, how grateful we are for Your kindness to us, Your mercies to us. Lord, awaken us as the people of God at Covenant to see and to realize and to know that You are the Lord over every detail of life. You've given us this amazing mission to be ministers of reconciliation, to take this incredible treasure which is the gospel and bring it into our world, and by your enabling grace, power and mercy to share this amazing message with everybody that you bring into our life circumstances. Lord, do that. Do that for Your name, for Your fame, for Your glory. We pray in Jesus's name,1 amen.