

Vision 20/20

*“Have you never read in the Scriptures: “The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone; this was the Lord’s doing, and it is marvelous in our eyes”?”
(Matthew 21:42 ESV)*

*“But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.”
(Acts 1:8 ESV)*

*“Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour.”
(Matthew 25:13 ESV)*

The Mission of the Church

October 27th, 2019

Matthew 28:18-20

Rev. Levi denBok

Introduction:

Good morning church! Please turn with me in your Bibles to Matthew 28.

Over the past five weeks, we have been walking through our mission statement as a church and we have been asking the question: Who are we?

- We are Jesus people, built on Christ the Cornerstone.
- We are witnesses who proclaim a glorious gospel.
- We are the family of God.
- We are compassionate like the Good Shepherd who sent us.
- And we are watching and waiting for the return of the Lord.

That’s who we are. By God’s grace, we will grow in that likeness year by year. Now we are turning our attention to a new question: What is our mission? Why does He have us here in the city of Orillia and what would He have us do?

To that end, look with me now at Matthew 28:18-20. Hear now God’s holy, inspired, living and active word to us today:

¹⁸ And Jesus came and said to them, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. ¹⁹ 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, ²⁰ teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.” (Matthew 28:18-20 ESV)

This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God.

I imagine that for most of you, this is not the first sermon you've heard on this passage. I HOPE it's not! There's a reason we keep coming back to this. This is a HUGELY significant text because it answers that HUGELY significant question: What is the mission of the church?

But before we study the answer, I want to draw your attention to something important. Before Jesus presents us with the mission, he draws our attention back to his universal authority. Do you see that? Look again at verse 18:

¹⁸ And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. ¹⁹ Go **therefore**... (Matthew 28:18-19a ESV)

Whenever we see a therefore, we ask "what is it there for?" Let's unpack that.

All Authority Has Been Given to Christ, Therefore

All authority has been given to Christ, therefore:

1. Obedience is not optional

If Jesus does NOT possess all authority, then he has no right to send us on this mission. More than that, if Jesus does NOT possess all authority, then the great commission is BLASPHEMY. He is calling us to go into all the world and to baptize people in his name. He's demanding universal obedience to his commandments. Even the Prime Minister's authority is limited. He can't go and impose his decrees on people living in Nepal.

But Jesus here claims authority over every tribe and nation in the world. He claims authority over the galaxies and the heavens. He calls us to proclaim this authority until the end of the age which means his authority was not limited to his time on earth, but it stretches forward through the generations.

Jesus is not just another teacher. He won't let you believe that. The entire Gospel of Matthew teaches us that Jesus is the fulfilment of all of the Old Testament promises! Matthew sets the stage for this with his opening words:

The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham. (Matthew 1:1 ESV)

He is the true King in the line of David. He is the seed of Moses through whom the whole world will be blessed. And here, in his final display of glory before the disciples, he emphatically pronounces that he is SO MUCH MORE.

He is God. He is the King of Kings and the Lord of Lords. He has authority over heaven and earth.

The prophet Daniel saw a day when this Godman would come. In Daniel 7:13-14 we read:

¹³ "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.

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. (Daniel 7:13-14 ESV)

Jesus is saying: "THAT'S ME! I have come! The Father has given to me ALL authority over heaven and earth and I possess that authority RIGHT NOW. Therefore, church, GO!"

This is no suggestion. This is the mandate of the King. To neglect the great commission is to reject the authority of Christ.

When we preach the gospel, we need to remember that we are not inviting people to choose Christ as their King. We're explaining to them with urgency that He already is their King! We're inviting them to choose whether they will bow to Him now with joy, or whether they will bow to him with trembling and fear when he returns.

This understanding propels our mission. The King is on his throne. All authority has been given to him; therefore, obedience is not optional.

But that's not all we're meant to see here. Jesus possesses all authority, therefore:

2. Fear is not necessary

This revelation is meant to give us courage! Immediately after giving us our impossible marching orders, he goes on to say:

And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age." (Matthew 28:20b ESV)

If we are going to fulfill our mission, we need to understand the power and authority of Christ and we need to REST in it. He is with us. D.A. Carson notes:

Because of that authority, his followers may go in confidence that their Lord is in sovereign control of "everything in heaven and on earth".¹

When I was in high school, I played on all the sports teams. I was lousy, but I showed up, and in Stayner that's really the only requirement. But there was one guy on the team who wasn't lousy at all. Dan.

Dan was a freak of nature. I can still vaguely remember what it felt like watching Dan run to centre field for the captain's coin toss. It felt good. We felt confident. As lousy as we all were, we were on Dan's team, so we knew we had a shot.

And, are you ready for this? Jesus is better than Dan.

¹ D.A. Carson, *The Expositor's Bible Commentary (Matthew-Luke)*, ed. Frank A. Gaebelin, vol. 8, 12 vols. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1981), 595.

Yes, the mission looks bleak. Yes, it's going to take a miracle to reach this city. Yes, all of those weaknesses that you see in yourself and that you see in this church are all REAL. YES! But LOOK AT JESUS.

Do you remember the story of Peter walking on the water? He saw Jesus standing on the waves and he said: "If that's you, master, let me come to you!" And Jesus called him out of the boat. And Peter did the impossible! He walked on the water! But somewhere along the way, he got scared. He saw the waves and he realized that he was getting farther and farther away from the safety of the boat, so he looked back. Do you remember what happened when he took his eyes off of Jesus?

He began to sink.

Friends, we will sink like a ROCK unless we fix our eyes on him! And sometimes as believers, we see him by hearing him. Look to him now:

All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me (Matthew 28:18b ESV)
And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age." (Matthew 28:20b ESV)

Now, we're going to turn our attention to the mission, and it's going to feel like an impossible mission, but we're not going to fret about that. Jesus is the Lord of heaven and earth. He's got this. Amen? He is sending us, and he is going with us. So, with that in mind, let's turn our attention to this great commission. Look again at verse 19:

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, ²⁰ teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. (Matthew 28:19-20a ESV)

If you've ever listened to a sermon about this particular text, then you have probably heard some version of what I am about to say. If we look at it in English, it seems like there are four, co-equal commands here: Go, make disciples, baptize them, and teach them to obey. This is one of those times when reading the text in Greek is really helpful. In the Greek we discover that there is only ONE imperative here.

Make disciples.

What we find in the great commission is a blueprint for disciple making:

A Blueprint for Disciple Making

The other verbs in this text are what we call "participles". They are shining light on the main command. How will we make disciples? We're going to go, and we're going to baptize them and we're going to teach them.

That's the blueprint for discipleship. With the time we have this morning, we're going to take a look at each of those steps and we're going to consider how they should inform our particular mission here.

First, if you want to make a disciple then you need to:

1. Go

Don't expect lost people to come running to you. You need to go to them.

Up until the time that Jesus said this, the Jews understood that they were meant to be a blessing to the nations, but they employed a “come and see” strategy. Meaning, Israel sought to live in such a way that the nations would be compelled to come and to hear about the God of the Jews. This happened in the days of Solomon. Israel grew in wealth and power and word of Solomon’s wisdom reached the Queen of Sheba. She came from far away for a closer look.

That was the mission strategy. Obey God, return to prominence, and the nations will come to us.

But in this text, Jesus presents a different strategy. Instead of waiting for the nations to come, the people of God are going to GO into all the nations.

There’s a pretty obvious application for us here. Listen: We can’t build our strategy around the assumption that lost people are going to seek us out. Look at that hallway. Do you see any unbelievers kicking down the doors to come in here and sing with us?

We don’t use our Sunday morning service as bait. There may come a day when you approach the leadership and say: “Haven’t you ever watched a TED talk? Shorten those sermons man! And, we need to stop doing this communion thing... It’s confusing for people and it makes them feel excluded.”

If our plan was to build a Sunday morning experience for unbelievers, then we might do all of those things. If our strategy was a “come and see” strategy, then you might be on to something.

But it’s not. Do you know what our strategy is? “GO and TELL!”

On Sunday morning, we gather together, and we fill ourselves up with God’s truth so that as we go, we can overflow to the world. On Sunday morning, we encounter the risen Lord in prayer and praise so as to be reminded that He has all authority! He is bigger than our trials! He is stronger than the unbelieving hearts that we keep running up against! He is worthy of their praise! And we partake of the Lord’s Supper and we remind ourselves that he is our sustenance. We have no strength on our own. Jesus is all we’ve got. And he is more than enough.

And then, we go out from this place into all the nations! We go to our homes, our workplaces, our neighbourhoods, the South Ward of Orillia, South Africa, Northern Ireland and Southeast Asia! We don’t expect a wave of unbelievers to rush through those doors to hear the Word of God. No, what we expect is that a wave of Spirit-filled believers will rush OUT those doors and will proclaim the glorious gospel everywhere they go! That’s the strategy! That’s how we’re going to change the world.

Step one in making a disciple: Go

Step two:

2. **Baptize them**

Remember now that baptism and conversion are tied together in the New Testament. Immediately after Peter’s sermon at Pentecost, people who had just come under the preaching of the gospel for the first time asked: “What must we do to be saved?” Peter replied:

“Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:38 ESV)

Do you see that? Repentance and baptism are tied together. We see the same thing in Acts chapter 8 when Philip led the Ethiopian eunuch to Christ:

³⁵ Then Philip opened his mouth, and beginning with this Scripture he told him the good news about Jesus. ³⁶ And as they were going along the road they came to some water, and the eunuch said, "See, here is water! What prevents me from being baptized?" (Acts 8:35-36 ESV)

In the New Testament, conversion and baptism went hand in hand. In our culture, we tend to separate the two. We tell people to wait. We tell them to bear more fruit. We tell them to show us that their faith is mature. And, as a result, we wind up with unbaptized believers in the church. But in every example we can find in the New Testament, people who come to Christ are immediately baptized. D.A. Carson notes:

The New Testament can scarcely conceive of a disciple who is not baptized or is not instructed.²

So, when Jesus tells us here that we are to baptize disciples in the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit, his concern is that we see our mission as seeking after CONVERSION. After we GO to lost people, the next step of disciple making is to lead people to surrender their lives to Christ and then to baptize them.

Therefore, we need to be able to communicate the gospel. On Tuesday night, six of us met at the Kollers house to brainstorm how we could better communicate this good news that we have with our friends and family. We're going to run that group again in the New Year. Ask yourself right now: "Could I communicate the gospel? Could I lead someone to Christ? Do I understand this message that has saved my life?" If the answer is no, please let us help you. We'll be running this group again in the New Year and we would even let you jump in for the final week this go around. A Christian who can't explain the gospel is like an NBA player who can't dribble. Let's teach each other how to dribble.

That's step two in the disciple making blueprint. And finally, after we have gone to the lost and have led them to Christ and have baptized them, we are going to:

3. Teach them to obey

Because baptism is just the beginning. It's the birthday party for the new-born, but now there's a life to be lived.

If we do the first two steps without following through with step three, then we're not making disciples. When that new believer comes up out of the water, they are a new creation, but they are still living in the midst of a fallen world! Even as they are filled with the Spirit of God, the old, sinful nature still lurks in the shadows of their hearts.

This third step is the hardest part! This is where it gets messy!

This is why, on the same day that a brother or sister goes through the waters of baptism, we give them a membership package. We believe that a public profession of faith should be followed by a clear identification with the local church. Every child of God should identify with the family of God.

² D.A. Carson, *The Expositor's Bible Commentary (Matthew-Luke)*, ed. Frank A. Gaebelin, vol. 8, 12 vols. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1981), 597.

This is a taboo subject these days, but we believe that membership is inherently Biblical. Just recently I came across this helpful article. The author notes:

Every letter in the New Testament assumes Christians are members of local churches. The letters themselves are addressed to local churches. They teach us how to get along with other members, how to encourage the weak within the church, how to conduct ourselves at church, and what to do with unrepentant sinners in the church. They command us to submit to our elders, and encourage us to go to our elders to pray. All these things are impossible if you aren't a member of a local church.³

Hear me out: Logistically, if you're here today and you're not a member, you're making it really hard for us to care for you as well as we feel called to. If you don't invite us to speak into your life, then it's really awkward when we try. If you don't invite us to hold you accountable, then it's hard for us to know if we should call you when you disappear.

We are really doing our best to do our part in building up the people of God, but like anything else that requires structure and mutual commitment.

Let me just put this upfront on the table: This is the pipeline that we're hoping to move every one of you through:

Unbeliever > Conversion > Baptism > Membership

Do you see your spot on that chart? Don't be surprised when I call you or take you out for coffee and gently nudge you towards the next step. We want to see you grow.

Now, you might look at that and say: "What, so membership is the end goal?"

No! But membership is the place where growth is optimized. Membership is the place where you invite an elder to give an account for you and you invite the church to speak into your life. Membership is the place where you formally ask us to help you to discover your gifts. Membership is the place where you invite us to pull you up when you fall down – because you know that when you fall down you might not be thinking clearly enough to WANT anyone to pull you back up.

To accept membership is to accept leadership. Again, that's not a great slogan if you're trying to make a sale in today's culture, but biblical leadership isn't like worldly leadership. Listen to what the Apostle Paul teaches us in his letter to the members of the church of Ephesus:

And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, ¹² **to equip the saints for the work of ministry**, for building up the body of Christ (Ephesians 4:11-12 ESV)

When you become a member, you say: "I'm in. I want to grow, and I accept your leadership." Our job, then, is to equip you for the work of ministry. Our job is to teach you all that Christ has commanded and to send you as disciple makers.

This is the blueprint for disciple making. This is what we're running with.

³ <https://www.riveroakstulsa.com/blog/post/what-is-church-membership-good-for> (Accessed Oct. 22, 2019).

We are going to equip the people of God to go to the lost people of the world. We're going to preach the gospel and we're going to baptize new believers. Then we're going to do our best to plug them into a faithful church under faithful leadership where they will be taught and equipped to continue the multiplication process. That's our strategy.

With that in mind, I want to flesh out two further implications for us here at Redeemer City Campus:

Two Implications

Because we believe that the local church is the means by which God equips His people for ministry:

1. We're going to plant churches locally

This city will never have too many healthy churches. Do you believe that?

Now, it's very possible that it might one day have too many unhealthy churches. In fact, one unhealthy church is already too many. But when it comes to healthy, word-saturated, gospel-centred, Christ-exalting churches, we will NEVER have too many of those in this city. Amen?

We believe that the local church is the optimal place for disciple multiplication. Therefore, our goal for reaching this city is going to be centred around church planting.

If we're going to continue to multiply and to plant churches, then we will need to equip and enable leaders. This is one of the reasons why we have young people and inexperienced people serving on our worship team here at RCC. It is engrained in our DNA that we will equip and stretch people so as to grow future leaders. And we've seen some leaders grow up under our noses, haven't we? Praise God!

In the same way, we see it as our responsibility to raise up preachers and teachers. We run the Barnabas programs and the Titus programs so that our men and women will be well versed in the Word of God. We just recently launched a lay person preaching workshop so that we can equip some of our men who are preaching even as they work full-time jobs. Beginning in January, on the fourth Sunday of every month, there will be lay preachers filling the pulpit here at RCC, because if God is calling us to plant more churches then we need to equip preachers and teachers.

This will eventually lead to a day when we watch as some of our good friends roll off to help plant another church in our city. On that day, we're going to celebrate because God blesses obedience. It wasn't easy when the main campus sent sixty of us down here to the South Ward, but here we are seven years later and there are 150 of us on any given Sunday!

Church planting is part of our DNA. This leads to our last implication:

2. We're going to partner with churches globally

The work that God has called us to stretches beyond Orillia. When Christ called us to go to the nations, he meant it. So, how are we going to engage with the nations?

We're going to run with the same philosophy that we are running with here at home: We are going to come alongside word-saturated, gospel-centred, Christ-exalting churches because we believe that there is power in the local church.

This means that we're not going to send money to support lone wolves who reject accountability with a local church. We won't do it.

It also means that we won't be the champions of programs that operate with no input from the local church and merely offer handouts to the community. That's not our approach, and frankly, I wish people would stop doing that altogether.

We're going to find local churches and we are going to pour into them because we believe that God will use them to do mighty things! Sometimes that will look like translating solid resources so that they can equip their people to better understand the Word. Sometimes that will look like support teams helping a partner church with a project. Sometimes that will look like a missionary going out from our midst to equip and resource local pastors.

Some of us will contribute to this global mission by sending resources and prayer. Others will hop on a plane and resettle their families. But make no mistake, we are ALL workers in this global mission field.

Christian, if you claim to be a disciple of Jesus Christ then you are called to be a disciple maker. How are you doing with that? Look behind you. Who are you leading? Look in front of you. Who's pouring into you?

If you need help, please ask. We as your brothers and sisters are here to walk with you and support you. The leaders of this church are here to equip you. Let us do that. Help us to help you.

And above all else, fix your eyes on Christ. We do this for Him. It's because we believe that all authority is rightfully his that we dare to do the hard work of making disciples. We want every person in this city to surrender to him with joy. We want every nation on the planet to see how glorious and awesome he is!

This has been the mission of the church for 2000 years. By God's grace, this is the mission we're going to advance both here and abroad. And this is the Word of the Lord. Thanks be to God. Let's pray.