

The Heart of Christ's Vision

Matthew 28:18-20

April 23, 2017

Our text for this morning is Matthew 28:18-20,

Then Jesus came to them [His disciples] and said, 'All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.¹⁹ Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,²⁰ and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.'

Francis Chan, in his book Multiply, challenges his readers to do the following exercise,

"Imagine your reaction if someone came back from the dead to speak to you. Seriously, try to imagine that right now [I will give you a few moments to do that. Imagine that someone you know and love has come from the dead specifically to tell you something]. What would you feel? How intensely would you listen? How seriously would you take his or her words?"

The last command Jesus gave to His disciples was spoken after He rose from the dead and just before He ascended to the right hand of God the Father. But before we talk about Christ's last command, do you remember what subject dominated Christ's interactions with His disciples during the 40 days He spent with them after His resurrection? We are explicitly told in Acts 1:3, "He [the resurrected Christ] appeared to them over a period of forty days and spoke about the kingdom of God."

And what was the focus of Christ's teaching when He began His public ministry? Mark 1:15, tells us, "'The time has come' . . . [a time anticipated by the prophets]. 'The kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news!'" It is pretty hard to miss the fact that the kingdom of God dominated Christ's thinking while He was here on earth. And I believe it is still dominating His thinking and activities in heaven. Christ wants His Kingdom extended all over the earth.

The kingdom of God can be a tricky subject because it sounds as if it was just about to begin when John the Baptist and Christ came upon the scene two thousand years ago. But that is not the case. Let me take you back 600 years before Christ's incarnation and show you what Daniel 4:34-35 says about God's kingdom. What is really amazing is who spoke these words,

" . . . I, Nebuchadnezzar, raised my eyes toward heaven . . . Then I praised the Most High; I honored and glorified him who lives forever. His dominion [rule] is an eternal dominion; his kingdom [the territory over which He rules] endures from generation to generation.³⁵ . . . He does as he pleases with the powers of heaven and the peoples of the earth."

Nebuchadnezzar clearly understood that God ruled the nations long before John the Baptist and Christ came and announced that the kingdom of heaven was near. And so how are we to understand the kingdom of heaven that was near? First of all, it is not the kingdom of heaven because it only exists in heaven. Its origin is from heaven, but it very much functions on the earth – and it has ever since God created the earth. Listen carefully – **it is the manner in which God's kingdom functions upon the earth – that Christ came to change.**

Let me explain it this way: The Bible says that God makes the rain to fall on the just and the unjust alike. This means that everyone experiences many blessings every day because of God's love and rule over this earth. The worst of sinners can plant an apple seed and watch an apple tree grow. The problem is that most people do not consider rain and seeds growing into plants as an act of God's love and rulership. Which means many blessings from God are ignored by the

vast majority of people on the earth. And so unfortunately, the most attention getting way that fallen mankind experiences God's rule is by means of God's judgments. But God's desire and plan is that more and more people will embrace Him and the path He has laid out for us – and thereby experience the blessings of God's rule – rather than suffer the judgments of His rule. God rules either way, but the blessings are what we should desire, not the judgments. **John 3:17** echoes this truth, *“For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.”*

Does this mean that God no longer judges sin? No. God continues to judge wickedness, so that righteousness and blessings can grow and move forward. The bottom line is that Christ's kingdom, the kingdom of God, the kingdom of heaven – expands upon this earth as more and more people embrace Christ's Kingship. Making disciples for Christ and extending the blessings of God's kingdom are inseparable. These truths set the stage for our consideration of Matthew 28:18-19,

“Then [the resurrected] Jesus came to them [His disciples] and said, ‘All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.’¹⁹ Therefore [in light of My authority] go and make disciples of all nations.”

The task that Christ has given to His followers, is a task we cannot do in our own strength [II Corinthians 3:5]. Neither you or I have the ability to make even one person into a new creation in Christ. Salvation is a supernatural event. But of course Christ never expected us to do this in our own strength. **Acts 1:4-9**, gives us more details about what Jesus told His disciples to do – just before He ascended into heaven,

*“... **Do not leave Jerusalem**, but wait for the gift my Father promised, which you have heard me speak about . . .⁸ you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”⁹ After he said this, he was taken up before their very eyes, and a cloud hid him from their sight.”*

Followers of Christ can only make disciples for Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit, who was sent to us by the authority of the ascended Lord Jesus. But getting back to Matthew 28:18, how did Jesus know that all authority in heaven and on earth had been given to Him? The answer is because the Old Testament had already revealed it – many centuries before God the Son came to the earth as a man. We were reminded last Sunday that over a thousand years before Christ came to be our perfect sacrifice for sin, King David was inspired by the Holy Spirit to write down the promise God the Father made to God the Son – at the time of Christ's ascension. Listen to the promise recorded in **Psalm 110:1-2**,

“Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies into a footstool for your feet [temples].² The LORD will extend your mighty scepter [a symbol of rulership] from Zion [Jerusalem – into all the nations]; you will rule [exercise authority] in the midst of your enemies.”

Mark Alvis was once at enmity with Christ – but by God's grace – Christ is now my embraced King and I am a temple of God. By the way, Psalm 110:2 is one of the reasons why Jesus told His disciples to stay at Jerusalem until they experienced the empowerment of the Holy Spirit, which would then enable them to be Christ's witnesses starting at Jerusalem and extending to the ends of the earth. Look what else the Old Testament tells us about what happened at Christ's ascension. This was recorded in **Daniel 7:13-15** – about 600 years before it happened,

“In my vision at night I [Daniel] looked, and there before me was one like a son of man [that was Christ's favorite title for Himself], coming with the clouds of heaven [and where did those clouds bring Him?]. He approached the Ancient of Days [God the Father] and was led into his presence [this is speaking of Christ's ascension].¹⁴ He was given authority, glory and sovereign power; all peoples, nations and men of every

language worshiped him [this is called prophetic certainty]. His dominion [rulership] is an everlasting dominion that will not pass away, and his kingdom is one that will never be destroyed."

No wonder the kingdom of God is central in Christ's thinking. These great Old Testament truths are a part of the good news of the gospel. It is why Living Hope Church presently supports 23 missionary efforts to extend the gospel and make disciples for Christ all over the world. And of course it is why we are committed to sharing the gospel and making disciples for Christ right here in the United and in our communities.

Friends, **God loves to tell us what He is going to do ahead of time, so that when it happens, He gets all the glory.** This is wonderfully expressed in **Amos 3:7**, "*Surely the Sovereign LORD does nothing without revealing his plan to his servants the prophets.*" God told both David and Daniel that Christ's rulership and kingdom would extend all over the earth – beginning at Jerusalem.

Let's go back to what our resurrected Lord Jesus has told us to do. In Matthew 28:19 Jesus says, "*Therefore [in light of fact that God the Father has already revealed what He is going to do] go and make disciples of all the nations . . .*" The command in verse 19 is not "go" – the command is to "make disciples." The going part of this command is a given. The idea is as you my followers live life, be committed to making disciples. Pastor Ken will speak more about this next Sunday, but it is obvious that people cannot become followers of Christ if no one ever tells them about Christ and the great things He has done and will do.

Verse 19 also tells us that one of the initial steps to being a disciple is to be baptized in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. In the Old Covenant, the outward sign of being a part of God's covenant people, was circumcision. If a boy was born into a home with believing parents, God commanded him to be circumcised at 8 days old. If a male child grew up in a home without believing parents and became a believer in the true and living God as an adult, then he was circumcised as an adult.

The outward of sign of being a part of God's New Covenant family is water baptism. At Living Hope Church we will baptize infants whose parents are believers, or we will dedicate them, and later encourage them to be baptized upon their profession of faith in Christ. If you are here this morning and have become a follower of Christ – but have never been baptized, we encourage you to do so. We have some young people even now who are ready to be baptized – why not join them? And if you are an adult and the thought of being baptized seems childish to you, then maybe becoming childlike is a good thing for you to do. Jesus said it is.

In verse 20, the final part of Christ's command to make disciples – is to teach followers of Christ to obey everything He has commanded us. The New Geneva Study Bible speaks to this part of Christ's command when it deals with the three purposes of God's Law:

"The first function [of God's Law] is to be a mirror reflecting to us both the perfect righteousness of God and our own sinfulness and shortcomings [we all fall short of God's glorious standards and need to repent and trust in Christ] . . . A second function [of God's Law], the "civil use," is to restrain evil. Though the [civil] law cannot change the heart, it can to some extent inhibit lawlessness by its threats of judgment, especially when backed up by a civil code that administers punishment for proven offenses . . . [a 65 mile an hour speed limit helps to restrain me from driving 100 miles an hour – because if I get caught driving a 100 miles an hour, I am going to receive a hefty fine]. [The Law's] . . . third function is to guide the regenerate [believers] into the good works that God has planned for them. The law tells God's children what will please their heavenly Father . . . Christ was speaking of this third use of the law when He said that those who become His disciples must be taught to do all that He had commanded them and that obedience to His commands will prove the reality of one's love for Him."

The Law of God was a central aspect of the Old Covenant Order and it continues to be a central part of the New Covenant Order. This is why God's Law is written on our hearts. No one is saved **by** good works, but we are all saved **for** good works.

The last part of the Great Commission is not a command – it is a promise. In Matthew 28:20, Jesus promises, “And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age” [referring to the New Covenant Age Christ inaugurated through His shed blood]. Most Christians do not think enough about how important that promise is. God made a similar promise to Moses in **Exodus 3:10-12**,

“So now, go. I am sending you to Pharaoh to bring my people the Israelites out of Egypt.”¹¹ But Moses said to God, ‘Who am I, that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the Israelites out of Egypt?’ [Moses felt just a tad bit inadequate]¹² And God said, ‘I will be with you.’ And this will be the sign to you that it is I who have sent you: When you have [successfully] brought the people out of Egypt, you will worship God on this mountain.”

I Samuel 18:14 tells us that after the Spirit of LORD came upon David, “*In everything he did he had great success, because the LORD was with him.*” And so we as Christians should have a good idea of what a successful Great Commission will look like – because Christ's followers will be successful in carrying it out. How do I know that? Because the One who has all authority in heaven and on earth has commanded us to do it and promised to be with us as we do.

What do you suppose will happen, if Living Hope Church decides that we are quite busy doing other activities and don't want to commit ourselves to making disciples who fully embrace Christ as King. Instead, we want to enjoy a comfortable Christianity. Let me tell you what will happen, God will raise up obedient Christians, who will do the job, and we can watch from the sidelines. But the task will be done because God has already promised that His people will bless all the nations of the earth. I don't know about you, but I want to participate in that – not just observe it. Let's pray.