

“Make Disciples”

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 27 August 2023

Preacher: Joe Hall

- [0 : 0 0] Well, this morning we have celebrated and witnessed William's baptism. It's a wonderful moment for William himself and his family and for us as a church family.
- And I wanted to bring us to these words that come at the end of Matthew's Gospel because basically they are why we have done what we have done. We baptize with water in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit because the risen Lord Jesus Christ told us to.
- And I hope today we see that that's not a random act or some kind of ritual or ceremonial thing that just happens to happen in the church, but has everything to do with what God is doing in the world today and our place in the world today as his people.
- Now, in October, we are going to begin a new series in Matthew's Gospel. So I don't want to give away too many spoilers today, but we do need to catch up with where we are in the story because Matthew is coming to the end.
- Of course, he's taken us from chapter one, the promise, the family history, the conception and birth of the Lord Jesus. He's taken us through Jesus' teaching, think the Sermon on the Mount, all the memorable things that Jesus has taught us.
- [1 : 2 7] He's taken us through Jesus' miracles, his healing, his casting out demons, he's raising the dead. He's taken us through Jesus' gathering followers to himself, outcasts and outsiders who he has called to follow him and who have followed him, to his suffering, rejection and death that Jesus said must happen to him.
- And it did. That's what it's all been leading to, the cross where Jesus died. But Matthew has said that's not the end of the story because at the beginning of this last chapter, chapter 28, he has told us that on the third day after he died, people went to the tomb of Jesus where he was buried and it was empty.
- And Jesus had risen from the dead. And he came and showed himself to his people and he spoke to them. And he told his people to meet him on a certain mountain back in Galilee.
- And that's where we are now. The 11 disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had told them to go. When they saw him, they worshipped him.
- But some doubted. I love the honesty of the Gospels. These are people who've walked with Jesus for years.
- [2 : 4 6] They watched him die. They have seen him alive again. But Matthew is quite upfront in saying that some of them had doubts in their hearts and their minds. They didn't have all the loose ends tied up.
- But there he was, their risen Lord. And they worshipped him. And then he speaks. And these last words of Jesus are rightly some of the most famous words in the Bible.
- They're known as the Great Commission. Because they tell us who Jesus is now. And what we, his people, are to do now. I don't know if you remember that conference that never happened two years ago.

It's been so long, actually, since it was cancelled. But some of you have come since it was cancelled and know nothing about it. Of course you don't. But it's been reorganized. Trinity Church is holding this conference in January.

What is the mission of the church? It's been so long, actually, that we as elders have had time to read the whole book together and discuss it. The book that it's based on.

[3 : 49] What is the mission of the church? We'd love you to come and ask us. I see some of them smiling. What is the mission of the church? I wonder what you would say it is. What are we here for?

What are we to do? Well, I'm convinced that the mission of the church is found in these words. That is to say, the mission of the church is the Great Commission.

It's as clear as it gets. It's in the mouth of Jesus himself. What on earth we're here to do? And they tell us as part of that, that what we've done this morning and what was done to William is one of the most significant things that can happen in the world.

Why is that? Well, let's start at the beginning of what Jesus has to say at the beginning of verse 13. Then Jesus came to them and said, All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.

If that is true, it changes everything, doesn't it? It's so big to think about what Jesus is saying.

[4 : 57] It's hard for us even to take it in. But let me put it this way. How much authority do you have in your life? If you're under the age of 18, probably not much.

Some of you might be a kind of team captain of a sports team or a club leader. Maybe you have authority to organize practices. Perhaps some of you are parents and you have authority to organize your children's routines, what they're involved in, how they grow up.

Maybe some of you are team leaders at work or business owners and you have authority over other workers, how they work, perhaps even how much they get paid.

That's quite a bit of authority. None of us are likely to have as much authority as authority, say, over a country. But the most we could say, perhaps, is I have some authority over one or two certain spheres of life.

Even in those spheres, we know that our authority isn't full, right? Complete. Our plans can be thwarted. Our words can be undermined.

[6 : 12] What we say isn't always what happens. Listen to Jesus. Jesus came and said to them, All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.

In other words, he has an uncontested, unrestricted right to rule every sphere of life, beginning from the highest heavens to the deepest depths of the earth, from pole to pole.

He is Lord. Can you get your head around that? Where does he have a right to speak and be listened to? Everywhere.

How much should his words be followed in our lives completely? Abraham Kuyper is a guy who knew a little bit about authority.

He was a Dutch theologian maybe a hundred years ago. He set up a denomination of churches. Not only that, he was prime minister of the Netherlands for four years.

[7 : 24] That's far more authority than any of us are likely to have. But here's the thing that he is remembered best for having said. There is not a square inch in the whole domain of human existence over which Christ, who is sovereign over all, does not cry, mine.

And not the selfish cry of a toddler snatching something from a friend and screaming, mine. But in the way that a newly crowned king might visit his new territories and lands and say, I now rule over this to you.

It's my head on the coins and on the stamps. Not because I have snatched it away or taken it, but because I have been given it by my father. So Christ does not grasp at authority.

But he says he has been given all authority in heaven and on earth by his father. So that now there is not one square inch of heaven and earth over which Christ does not have full authority.

Not one atom moves without his permission. And not one second passes without his word. And not one heartbeat happens without his say-so.

[8 : 48] And if we know Jesus, and if we read through this gospel from start to finish, as we will do, and as I encourage you to do, we would know, having seen his love and compassion and mercy and justice and kindness, as well as his power and authority.

That that is one of the most wonderful things that we could ever, ever hear. That over the chaos and confusion and conflicts of our world, Jesus is in ultimate control of the history of our world and the course of our lives.

That this same Jesus, who lived and died and rose again so many years ago, is now seated on the throne of the universe, ruling over all.

That's what we need to know today, friends. That is what Jesus wants us to hear. A few weeks ago, we looked at a passage where he asked his followers, who do you say that I am?

Well, here he is telling us, this is who I am. I wonder, what would you say? Who is Jesus? Our answer to that question is the most important we could give to any question at all.

[10 : 05] Because who we say is in control and who we say has authority over our lives will shape our destiny and who we are and how we live out our lives.

We love the idea today, don't we? That we live our own way, we do our own thing, we do us, you do you. But none of us really lives like that.

If we say Jesus is a good guy, he's okay, but I'm the one who makes the decisions about my life, well then, we will go the way that the world wants us to go.

The course of life that our culture sets for us, or the media, what we consume, the way that we think. We think we're our own. Friends, we are not. If we say that Jesus is Lord, and he makes the decisions about my life, and I follow him, then our lives will follow the course that he has set for us, and we will walk in his way.

And to cut an incredible story short, that's the difference between William being baptized today and him not. Or between any of us as Christians, if we call ourselves Christians here, being here or us not.

[11 : 17] Who do we say Jesus is? Do we say he is Lord? That is the question. He claims the right to rule everyone and everything. If he's wrong, he's irrelevant.

If he's right, he is indescribably important. What he can't be is mildly interesting. We can't dabble in Jesus.

He doesn't let us do that. He's either right or he's wrong about this. So that is the question. Who do you say he is? Do you believe him? If you're not sure today, and you'd like to have a chat, or even a read through Matthew's gospel, please do.

Come and speak to me afterwards, or any of the Christians here, if you came with someone, get them to help you out. Because seeing who Jesus is helps us see then what we live for, what we're here to do.

Just glance down with me at verse 19. All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore, go and make disciples of all nations.

[12 : 28] Now, do you see the connection? If Christ cries mine over every square inch of reality, then the mission of his people on earth is to see that claim through in our own lives, first of all, but in the lives of others too.

So Jesus says to his followers, go and make followers of me from all nations, every nation. Of course, at this point, his only followers were from one people group.

They were Jewish, but his claim isn't simply to be king of the Jews. It is to be lord of all. So his kingdom must spread to every nation of the world, not stay in one.

And for that to happen, his followers would have to do something. But what? What is it his followers have to do? If you had to pick out one instruction from these words, I wonder what it would be.

There's one command, one imperative. I wonder if you know what it is. Possibly we would say it's the first word, go.

[13 : 33] Now that sounds like a really good option, doesn't it? It's the first verb. It's punchy. But in the original Greek, it's not a command. It's actually technically called a participle.

That is to say, it's like the other words later on in the verse. It's an ing word. Baptizing, teaching, going. So that a more Greek way of saying it would be therefore going, or as you go, make disciples.

Because, brothers and sisters, that is the one command, the one imperative in this verse, make disciples. So to carry out this great commission, what do we have to do?

Well, we don't have to go, but we do have to be in the business of making disciples. Now, don't get me wrong. There have been times in history, and indeed today, when going has been necessary to make disciples of all nations.

I think I've shared before about the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland of 1796. a proposal was brought to the Church of Scotland that we should send missionaries to places like China and India and places where the gospel hasn't yet reached and taken root.

[14 : 56] We should go and take the gospel there. And there was huge opposition. And one of the reasons given was, while there remains at home a single individual every year without the means of religious knowledge to propagate it abroad would be improper and absurd.

In short, the pushback was, it's just about us. It's our nation. That's all we need to think about or worry about. But then a minister named John Erskine stood up and said, reach me that Bible.

And he opened it to, guess what? This page. And he read these words. Therefore, go and make disciples of all nations. And he sat down.

And the opposition folded. Because, of course, Jesus had spoken. And the Church did send missionaries to other places in the world. And we can all be thankful for that today, whether you call yourself a Christian or not, because the world would be a very different place had the Church not sent people to share the gospel in other parts of our world today.

So, do we only get to be part of the spread of Jesus' kingdom if we go to another place to do it? No. Sometimes it is necessary for the Church to go.

[16 : 19] When new churches, say, are planted in places where there's no gospel church, then we go. Or when Christians are sent to another part of the world to start up a new work or support gospel witness, then we go.

But that's not most of us, is it? So, what about the rest of us? Well, you need to know when Jesus says, is make disciples as you go.

The command is for us to make disciples on our way as we are going, wherever we're going, whatever we're doing, that there is to be, he says, a new purpose to life, a new agenda, a new mission, an intentionality behind what we're doing in our day-to-day lives.

And the mission is to make disciples, to point people to Jesus, and to help them to follow him. That's what it is, to point people to Jesus and to help them to learn to follow him.

Would you say that's your mission in life? When I was growing up, Mission Impossible was all the rage. And because we were really trendy, you'd often hear from the front of church this phrase, your mission should you choose to accept it.

[17 : 49] But that's not it, is it? As catchy as that is, it's not our mission if we choose to accept it. The one with all authority in heaven and on earth didn't say, if you choose to, would you mind making disciples of all nations, please?

It's not what he says, is it? No, if we follow King Jesus, we don't get to choose, he gets to choose. He sets the agenda. And this is his commission.

Make disciples. And it doesn't matter who he is. Jesus didn't say, make disciples of your family or make disciples of your next-door neighbors.

It could be your family. It could be your neighbors. It could be somebody who's come here on holiday. It could be your boss. It could be anyone. Because Jesus says, make disciples of all nations, of everyone.

It's as inclusive a mandate as we could ask for, isn't it? There's nobody, there's nobody in your life, there's nobody in the whole world, that it would not be right for you to point to Jesus.

[18 : 56] Isn't that freeing? Isn't that wonderful to know? We don't have to pick and choose. We don't have to decide. It doesn't matter who it is. Because the only qualification or condition of being a disciple of Jesus is that you follow him on his terms and in his way.

If you wouldn't call yourself a Christian today, you need to know that you don't need to be a special kind of person to be a Christian. It does not matter what kind of family that you were born into or what kind of society you were raised in or what kind of beliefs you were brought up with.

To be a Christian, you simply need to recognize who Jesus is and put your trust in him and follow where he leads in his way. So how do you become a disciple or a follower of Jesus?

Well, Jesus says it's more surprising than we might think. What would we say makes someone a follower of Jesus? Well, Jesus says it is those two ing words that come after the imperative that make you a disciple.

Make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.

[20 : 21] Baptizing and teaching. That's why I'm preaching from these words today. That's what makes baptism so special because Jesus says this is where it all begins.

As a church, we believe that that's true, whether that's a weak old baby of Christian parents or a grown man or woman who's put their trust in Christ, Jesus says the journey begins when that person is baptized in the name of the living, true, triune God, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

One God in three persons. So do you see why what has happened in our service today, what we've witnessed, is so special? It didn't make William a Christian. He was a Christian already, but it marks the start of a new identity identity, a new beginning.

One way I found really helpful of thinking about it is when a child is adopted, he or she might take the name of the adoptive family into which he or she has come to mark the start of a new family, a new identity.

So when we are baptized, we take the name of the triune God, the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, that's the family we belong to now, the covenant family of the living God.

[21 : 47] That's who we are now, our identity. We are his, and he is ours in a special way. Of course, we might still reject that identity and reject that family.

And that's true of people who've been baptized as babies and of believers, sadly, because it's not baptism in itself that changes us. But what our baptism points to, and that is a new life in Christ, a putting off of the old self and a putting on of the new, a putting off of sin and a putting on of Christ.

Baptism isn't the end or an end in itself, but the beginning of a lifelong identity that we live each and every day, a new name, a new family, a new me, which is why it's also the start of a lifelong lesson in the school of Jesus.

Because the other word is teaching. Teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. Now, I'm not going to ask for a show of hands, but I wonder how many of us would say that we have understood and obey everything that Jesus has commanded us each and every day all the time.

In fact, I could ask for a show of hands because the result would be the same. I trust that none of us would dare to raise our hands to say, I have understood and I live the commands of Jesus each and every day, 24 hours a day.

[23 : 24] I can't say that. None of us can. So what do we need? Jesus says, teaching. Do you know that's what a disciple is?

It literally means learner, one who is taught. So to be a disciple, we must be learning. If we stop learning, we quickly stop following.

And speaking to some of you who've grown up in the free church and maybe others can relate to this too, I think in our tradition, conversion. And maybe you can correct me. I think there's such a great stress put on the point of conversion.

Am I saved? And how do I know that I am saved? That sometimes it takes people decades to get to that point of saying, yes, I am saved and I am a Christian.

So long that you might almost come away thinking once you've taken that step, there's nothing more to learn because I'm there. I've crossed the finish line. This is me.

[24 : 29] Now in a sense, yes, it is a wonderful thing to have settled with Christ and know that you are saved. But Jesus says, listen, that's not the end. That's the beginning. That's when we begin to learn everything he's commanded us and begin to put it into practice.

You're taking years and years to commit inwardly and outwardly to Jesus and then thinking that's you whom is a bit like a runner taking a really long, hard way to get to the start line of a race and then sitting down and saying, I'm so glad I've made it.

But the race is yet to be run. You're standing at the beginning, not at the end. And I say that, please don't get me wrong, not to take away the wonder and the freshness and excitement of having decided to run the race, but to say how much more exciting it is to stand at the start line and know that there is a lifetime of growth and learning and fellowship and obedience ahead of you at the point that you commit to Jesus.

The day that you are baptized, you get spiritual L plates and they do not come off until we really have crossed the finish line, until the day we go up to heaven or heaven comes down to us.

That's really important for us all to know for ourselves today if we follow Jesus, but for others also. Again, what was that one command? Not to make converts, but to make disciples.

[26 : 09] What do I mean? I mean that the point isn't to bring somebody to the point of a decision and if they say yes, then we've succeeded. that's a convert.

The point is to bring someone to the point of decision and if they say yes, then we begin to teach them to obey everything that Jesus has taught us.

That's a disciple. Do you see the difference between those two? One stops at the point of decision, one starts at the point of decision. Jesus says it's the second one that he wants, disciples.

disciples, not converts. So those are two surprising things then that make a disciple being baptized and being taught to follow Jesus and that's what's so exciting about a day like this because I hope we can see now that baptism is not a formality or just a kind of ceremony that we do once in a while.

It's the bleeding edge of Jesus' mission in this world. world. This is where disciples are made through you, through us, our witness to Christ's death and resurrection in this world, bringing people to him so that they might identify with him and take that step and if they have not already been, to be baptized.

[27 : 37] baptized. And my prayer is that we have people beginning to follow Jesus here every week as we carry out his great commission in our lives to point people to him and help them to follow him and begin to show them what living the Christian life is all about because that, friends, is how the kingdom of Jesus grows and spreads.

Some of us were at an event last night and one of the phrases that was used was the re-evangelization of Scotland. That's a big phrase that the speaker said in his opinion you have to go as far back as before the Reformation to get to a time that you could compare to the spiritual state of Scotland today.

That's where we are. That's the field that we are in and it is vast is it not? Taking the gospel back out to Scotland, let alone the world and every nation.

If that feels too big for us, well, we're right. It should feel too big for us. And so listen to this.

Jesus gives us one last reminder of whose mission it is and who it depends on. His very last words. We can't neglect this. And surely I am with you always.

[29 : 02] to the very end of the age. Surely I am with you. Brothers and sisters, however impossible the task feels, 2,000 years after he promised it, today is another confirmation that it is true that he is keeping that promise, that he is with us in our witness to the very end.

And what does that mean? That means more baptisms, more witness, more teaching, more disciples, more mission. And so, brothers and sisters, let us make disciples of Jesus by the presence and power of Jesus and for the glory of Jesus, baptizing them in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that he has commanded us until he comes again to the very end of the age.

Let's pray together for that. Our Father, we praise you for your work of grace in our lives.

We thank you for revealing your kindness and love to us in the coming of Jesus. And Lord, we are overwhelmed by your grace. We're overwhelmed by your love. And we're overwhelmed by your call.

And how we pray that we would know the presence of Jesus with us. Lord, we pray for your Holy Spirit to be at work in our hearts. Lord, especially those who today have not yet committed to trust and follow Jesus.

[30 : 45] Lord, would you give a new heart and would you give faith and boldness to take that step and to follow him throughout their life long. And Father, for those of us who have done that, keep us following, we ask.

Keep us humble, keep us learning. Lord, keep us with our L-plates on, disciples of Jesus. And help us, we pray, to take that message out this week.

Give us opportunity, we ask, in simple ways to point people to the one who saved us. Lord, we thank you for those who are coming up the stairs now to join us for the end of our service.

Lord, those many of whom have been baptized. Lord, how we pray for them and that they would grow into their faith and own Jesus for themselves. Lord, that would be true for all of us.

For we pray it in Jesus' name. Amen.