

## ***The Doctrine of the Church: The Mission of the Church***

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May 14, 2023

*[What follows is the transcript of a sermon. It was originally intended to be heard, not read, so the tone is more conversational than academic. It has only been loosely edited, so forgive any grammatical, syntactical, or spelling errors. If you have questions, please get in touch with Pastor Derek at [dberry@calvarybaptistsc.church](mailto:dberry@calvarybaptistsc.church).]*

Take your copy of God's Word and meet me in Matthew 28:16-20...

This week is the last installment of our *Doctrine of the Church* series. Therefore, allow me to provide you with a brief recap of what we've covered over the previous eight weeks. In the first message, we defined the local church. With Leeman's help, we defined a local church as *"A local church is a group of Christians who regularly gather in Christ's name to officially affirm and oversee one another's membership in Jesus Christ and his kingdom through gospel preaching and gospel ordinances."* We also considered the four elements that differentiate a group of Christians from a local church; namely, a local church gathers regularly, there's congregation-wide responsibility of one another's discipleship, a local church's stated purpose is to represent Christ and his rule on earth as they gather in his name. Preaching and the ordinances are employed for the stated purposes. We also discovered that when God reconciles us to himself, we're automatically tethered to the universal body of Christ, which is made tangible through church membership. This is why church membership is not an option.

In the second message, we examined church polity, specifically the Keys of the Kingdom and congregationalism. We found that Biblical congregationalism is more than the idea of a church voting on issues; it also entails authorization by Jesus himself. We took a look at congregationalism by covenantal trajectory. In other words, we traced the Priest-King theme from Adam to Israel, Jesus, and the Church. Jesus Himself has authorized local churches to employ the keys of the kingdom by deciding whose in and out. So it is the responsibility of the church members to affirm gospel citizens; therefore, church members must know the gospel and understand biblical conversion.

In the third message, we considered the following two responsibilities of church members after affirming gospel citizens: protecting the gospel and disciplining other members. The church members are responsible for protecting the gospel's ministry in the local church. Five ways members protect the gospel:

1. Affirming gospel citizens and excommunicating those not in step.
2. By loving one another (living in harmony)
3. Personal holiness
4. By knowing the gospel well
5. Financial giving

And then, we considered quite a few New Testament passages that instruct members to teach and lead one another. Singing is a form of discipleship, along with Bible reading, life imitation, prayer, etc.

In the fourth message, we considered how a proper understanding of conversion would impact our evangelism. The Bible very clearly proclaims that God is sovereign in salvation and that he transforms those whom he saves. Therefore, we stray from manipulation when evangelizing but stick to the same offensive gospel that Jesus and the Apostles preached. It was also clear from the Scriptures that church members are responsible for sharing the gospel with outsiders.

In the fifth message, we focused on the two offices of elder and deacon. Deacons care for the physical needs of the church, strive for unity, and are appointed to support the work of the pastors. Therefore, considering that this is a role considered with serving, I provided reasons why I believe women can serve as deaconesses. And then we considered the part of elders/pastors, which is reserved for men, the primary teachers of the Bible. They also shepherd God's people by gathering and protecting them from wolves, and they provide an example to be followed by the congregation.

In the sixth message, we examined the idea of church discipline. We distinguished between formative and corrective church discipline. And we saw that we excommunicate individuals from the church:

1. For the good of the person disciplined
2. For the Good of Other Christians, as They See the Danger of Sin.
3. For the Health of the Church as a whole
4. For the corporate witness of the Church
5. For the glory of God

In the seventh message, we considered the importance of the ordinances and how they are tied to the keys of the kingdom. Baptism is the birth certificate or passport for kingdom citizens. It's a requirement for church membership and how local churches bind individuals into membership. We also saw how the Lord's Supper makes many one and that this ordinance is reserved for those members of local gospel preaching churches.

Last week, we considered the importance of the gathering. Our assembling together is not optional; instead, it's fundamentally who we are, an assembly. And our assembling

together should be in-person, regular, and full of horizontal encouragement and vertical praise. The host of the heavens is present when we gather together.

In our last installment this morning, we'll consider the mission of the church because it's pivotal that we're all on the same page in this regard. We'll start with a definition and then spend the rest of our time seeing if the Bible supports this definition. But first, let me be clear as to what we're answering when we ask, "What is the mission of the church?" The word "mission" comes from a Latin word that means "to send." So, we're not seeking to determine what the church does or is free to do. Instead, "What is the specific task or purpose the church was sent into the world to accomplish?" If a spy was sent into another country with a specific mission of retrieving information, asking, "What is your mission," and "What all will you do" are two different questions. So as John Stott has argued, mission is not everything the church does, but instead describes "everything the church is sent into the world to do." So, here's the definition:

*"The mission of the church is to go into the world and make disciples by declaring the gospel of Jesus Christ in the power of the Spirit and gathering these disciples into churches, that they might worship the Lord and obey his commands now and in eternity to the glory of God the Father." -Greg Gilbert and Kevin DeYoung*

In other words, what we find in the Matthew 28 Great Commission passage. Here are some preliminary thoughts before we dive into this mission. Firstly, be careful about finding one passage in Scripture and making that the church's overall mission. That's a very easy hole to find yourself in. For instance:

*<sup>10</sup> Whoever is righteous has regard for the life of his beast, but the mercy of the wicked is cruel. -Proverbs 12:10*

One might say, "See there, our mission is to take good care of animals." Well no. If we own animals, we should take care of them, but does that equate to becoming the reason the church was sent? No. There are many other examples I could give. Often someone passionate about a particular subject will find a biblical passage that suits their conviction, and the next thing you know, they're binding the conscience of every local church to act on this conviction. But this isn't the proper way to discover what the Bible says concerning the church's mission. However, we see this often, particularly in our day and age.

With that said, let's consider two sides of what is really the same coin in our culture today. First, the church's primary mission is not to fix societal ills. In this section, I'll seek to be clear about what I do and don't mean. I don't mean that Christians should be

indifferent toward the suffering in the world around us. I hope my pastoral prayers make that clear. I don't think evangelism is the only thing that counts, nor that Christians who risk their lives for the marginalized should be seen as suspect. I'm not saying we should only care about souls and not the material state of our fellow man and that Christians who find creative and courageous ways to love their neighbors and impact cities are wrong.

When you get a chance, look up the story of Raymond Flanks. He's a black man from Louisiana who was falsely accused of murder and was subsequently incarcerated for almost 39 years. Due to the corruption of those involved in his case, he wasn't given a fair trial. However, a Christian organization received his case and was compelled to fight for his freedom. He was released once the evidence was released and is now a New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary graduate. All of that to say, the work of these Christians was noble, honorable, and praiseworthy.

I do, however, want us to understand that the proclamation of the gospel is of first importance in the local church. I do want us to grasp the utterly unique task of making disciples as the church of Christ because if we don't do that, nobody will. And ultimately want us to understand our primary job in this world as the gathered church.

So again, the church's primary mission is not to fix societal ills, although that will naturally happen. We've already looked at Matthew 28, but let's examine a few more texts where the Lord Jesus sends out his apostles for the mission.

*<sup>44</sup> Then he said to them, "These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you, that everything written about me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled."<sup>45</sup> Then he opened their minds to understand the Scriptures,<sup>46</sup> and said to them, "Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead,<sup>47</sup> and that repentance for the forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem.<sup>48</sup> You are witnesses of these things.<sup>49</sup> And behold, I am sending the promise of my Father upon you. But stay in the city until you are clothed with power from on high." -Luke 24:44-49*

So, the Great Commission in Luke's account consists of bearing witness to Christ's death and resurrection and calling all nations to repentance for the forgiveness of sins. This is similar to what we find in Acts 1:8.

*<sup>8</sup> 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."<sup>8</sup> -Acts 1:8*

And what do you see when you read the book of Acts? You don't find the early church giving itself to creation care. That's not to say that we, as Christians, shouldn't steward the earth's resources well. However, some people place such a high emphasis on a local church's need to give itself to climate issues that it seems they've misunderstood the primary reason the local church exists. The early church didn't give itself to societal renewal; they knew Rome was rotten! What you find is preaching, teaching, and the centrality of the Word. I like how Darrell Bock puts it: *"This commission [Acts 1:8] describes the church's key assignment of what to do until the Lord returns. The priority for the church until Jesus returns, a mission of which the community must never lose sight, is to witness to Jesus to the end of the earth. The church exists, in major part, to extend the apostolic witness to Jesus everywhere."*

Now, this doesn't mean that the church in Acts is one big evangelistic rally. Acts 14 gives an excellent example of how the early church accomplished its mission.

*<sup>21</sup> When they had preached the gospel to that city and had made many disciples, they returned to Lystra and to Iconium and to Antioch,<sup>22</sup> strengthening the souls of the disciples, encouraging them to continue in the faith, and saying that through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God. <sup>23</sup> And when they had appointed elders for them in every church, with prayer and fasting they committed them to the Lord in whom they had believed. -Acts 14:21-23*

So, evangelism is present and even critical, but we also find church planting and discipleship (or the strengthening of the disciples). And this is a good model for us to concentrate our energy, finances, and focus. Let us preach the gospel to the lost, add them to our number for discipleship, and seek to multiply by planting other churches in the Bay Area. I met with the new director of Gateway Seminary this past week, and he asked me for my vision for Calvary, and this was pretty much it. I know! Nothing extravagant, but it's biblical!

If you recall, earlier, I stated that the erasing of societal ills is a result of the primary work of the church in preaching the gospel and making disciples. In his article, *Missions: Rescuing from Hell and Renewing the World*, John Piper discusses sociologist Robert Woodberry's research. Woodberry's research found that areas in which "conversionary protestants" missionaries had a significant presence on average were "more economically developed today, with comparatively better health, lower infant mortality, lower corruption, greater literacy, higher educational attainment (especially for women) and more robust membership in nongovernmental associations." According to his research, Protestant clergy financed by the state and Catholic missionaries that sought

to tackle social issues primarily had no comparable effect in the areas where they worked. So these positive outcomes resulted from missionaries who didn't set out to be political activists first and foremost. This leads Piper to this conclusion:

*"The implication is that the way to achieve the greatest social and cultural transformation is not to focus on social and cultural transformation, but on the "conversion" of individuals from false religions to faith in Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of sins and the hope of eternal life. Or, to put it another way, missionaries (and pastors and churches) will lose their culturally transforming power if they make cultural transformation their energizing focus...The point is this: Conversion to faith in Christ by the Spirit through faith accomplishes two things-rescue from the wrath of God, and transformation of life. This is ultimately why Robert Woodberry found what he found. "Conversionary Protestants" changed the world, because they didn't focus first on changing the world, but on faith in Christ."*

The other side of that coin is that the church's mission is not to create Christian nations. And by the way, a nation cannot be Christian because a nation can't be regenerated. People are Christians because God is regenerating people. That's not to say that a country can't be founded on Christian values and principles; however, God hasn't covenanted with America as he did with Israel in the Old Testament. This is why it's essential to understand how the covenants are fulfilled in Jesus. God no longer covenants with a national, ethnic group, but instead with individuals he saves that make a corporate people, namely the church. To be clear, I understand the sentiment. As the nation continues to get more extreme and blatantly anti-God in its policies, this idea of Christian nationalism will pick up more steam, as it has in many evangelical circles. Often leaders will present it as a binary.

Well, we can either have an extreme pagan nation where they come for your kids, or we can join Christianity to the government where not only the second table of the law is enforced by the government, but also the first half. History has shown that there's no middle ground. The government will either belong to the pagans or us and why in the world would we want it to belong to them? That's the basic argument. But I reject that binary. It's like being in the hospital beside someone dying, and the false prosperity preacher tells them they can be saved with enough faith. And when I reject that this notion is taught in the Bible, the false teacher says, well, what do you have to offer? Well, all I can do is give you what the Bible says.

The primary problem with this argument is that it has absolutely no Biblical foundation. None whatsoever. It's a clever argument and grips the hearts of those who lament the current state of our country, but it's not Bible. The government has one jurisdiction, and

the church has another. In other words, the state has a mission, and the church has a mission, and nowhere does the New Testament tell us that the two are to be joined (Romans 13). It doesn't get more pagan than the context of the early church; however, the Apostles remind the saints that they are pilgrims and give their lives to building healthy churches. And so should we!

The American experiment is just that, an experiment. Therefore, let us not place our hope in a country or a leader who will lead us back to the glory days. Instead, let us put our hope in trust in the King of Kings, who has given his life to purchase a church that will represent him amid a world that hates him.

So, our mission is not societal change, nor is it to make this nation Christian. Before concluding with a brief examination of Matthew 28, I'd like to provide two more clarifications.

First, good works by the church are not an option. I'm not saying that churches are free to "just preach the gospel" apart from collective works that serve as a witness to a lost world. Hopefully, that's not what's coming across. There seems to especially be an emphasis for churches to serve the financially poor. An excellent book to read alongside Gilbert and DeYoung's book would be *Spurgeon and the Poor. Here are a couple of passages that make this point clear:*

*<sup>14</sup> who gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for himself a people for his own possession who are zealous for good works. -Titus 2:14*

*<sup>13</sup> "You are the salt of the earth, but if salt has lost its taste, how shall its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything except to be thrown out and trampled under people's feet. <sup>14</sup> "You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. <sup>15</sup> Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house. <sup>16</sup> In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven. -Matthew 5:13-16*

Both of these have corporate implications to them. I just want to highlight what has priority and what's central to the church's mission so we don't put the cart before the horse. Our good works are not ultimate; they serve as a witness for the gospel we proclaim. So, it's all about keeping things in perspective. But we do good works to obey God because we love our neighbors and to show God's character in hopes of an open door for the gospel.

Second, clarification, which is related, there's a difference between the organized local church and individual Christians. As we've studied, the local church has been given authorization and mandate that individual believers have not. Local churches observe

the ordinances and can excommunicate professing believers; individual Christians cannot. And vice versa, Christian married couples' bodies belong to one another, which isn't the case for the local church. Do you get the drift? So if a group of Christians get together and form an alliance dedicated to fighting injustice in the legal system, that would be fine. As a matter of fact, it would be commendable. However, if a church decides that its primary mission will be to fight injustices in the legal system, that would be an abdication of its primary mission. Do you see the difference?

Jonathan Leeman contributes to the book's *four views on the church's mission*. Unsurprisingly, he argues for the view that has been presented this morning. He delineates between individual Christians and the church assembled in terms of kingly and priestly offices.

*“Broadly, God sends every member of a church to do what Adam failed to do: represent him in kingly fashion as his dominion-establishing, God-imagining ‘sons...’ Narrowly, God sends the church-as-organized-collective to make disciples or citizens, not just with words but with a particular kind of priestly words-adjudicatory declarations of binding and loosing...In a phrase, the broad mission (for individual Christians) is to be disciples or citizens, and the narrow mission (for local churches) is to make disciples or citizens.”*  
-Jonathan Leeman.

I think that's helpful. This is why it bothers me when someone declares what churches *must* and even *should* do. If what follows those verbs is preach the gospel, make disciples, and display good works, I'm all in. But if it's anything else, you're outside the lines of Scriptural mandate. We must be careful of binding the conscience of local churches with our own areas of passion. There's a difference between what a local church *can* do and what it *must* do.

Here's an example. Imagine a company whose mission is to make and sell T-shirts. Would it be illegitimate for that company to spend some of its resources holding a company picnic for its employees? No. They may decide that the picnic will further the mission by raising morale, fostering teamwork, etc. Similarly, local churches are free to spend resources on projects that are less directly furthering the mission; however, it seems wisdom would lead churches to spend most of their resources and energy on projects that more directly impact the mission. And what is the mission? Let's consider the definition one more time before concluding in Matthew 28.

*“The mission of the church is to go into the world and make disciples by declaring the gospel of Jesus Christ in the power of the Spirit and gathering these disciples into*



*churches, that they might worship the Lord and obey his commands now and in eternity to the glory of God the Father.” -Greg Gilbert and Kevin DeYoung*

Please turn with me to Matthew 28:16. Mountains are places where the most crucial instruction or revelation is given. Consider Sinai with Moses and the Sermon on the Mount with Jesus. Therefore, Matthew points out that this is taking place on a mountain is significant. Verses 17-18. Some worshipped Jesus, which highlights his divinity. If he were anybody other than God, this worship would be idolatrous. And others remained doubtful! Maybe it was because of their current circumstance. Perhaps you're here this morning and are doubtful of who God is due to your current circumstance. Allow this text to encourage you! Jesus is alive and possesses all authority; therefore, worship him!

Now here's the mission of the church. We'll look at it in three points. Make, mark, and mature—verse 19. “Make disciples” is the main verb in this text. This is the call for local churches. When you read this in light of Matthew 16 and 18, it's clear that this text does not refer to individual believers but to the Apostles and local churches. Therefore, parachurch organizations, such as college groups, detached from the local church is insufficient. Discipleship should take place primarily within the local church. We are to make disciples. And then, he explains with three other verbs the “how” regarding making disciples. He's already said one, which is the “go.” Meaning Jesus sends the local church with the task of making disciples. Continuing in verse 19, we are to mark off disciples through baptism in the Triune name of our God. This is how we bind believers into the local church. This also implies evangelism and a pure enough understanding of the gospel and conversion to identify the *who* and the *what* of the gospel. And then, we see maturation in verse 20. Teaching clarifies that Jesus wants more than hands raised; he desires obedient, mature disciples. This is a process. And then he ends with the promise to be with us always to the end of the age. This idea of God with his people bookends this gospel writing.

<sup>23</sup> *“Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call his name Immanuel” (which means, God with us). -Matthew 1:23*

If we desire to thrive as a healthy church, we must be on one accord regarding the mission that the Lord Jesus has commissioned us to accomplish. And this must mean more than a simple title on our church website; we must be about the business of making disciples, for we have the sweet promise that through the Holy Spirit, Jesus is with us every step of the way.

Let's pray.