

Matthew 28:16-20 A Call to Mission

Introduction

What matters most? Mission is not the ultimate goal of the individual Christian or the Church established by Jesus; the worship and glorification of King Jesus, our great Lord and Saviour, exalting and lifting high our God and King is our goal. This is ultimately what is most important. Psalm 96:1-4a: *Sing to the Lord a new song; sing to the Lord, all the earth.* ² *Sing to the Lord, praise His name; proclaim His salvation day after day.* ³ *Declare His glory among the nations, His marvellous deeds among all peoples.* ⁴ *For great is the Lord and most worthy of praise; Why do we do this because: The Lord reigns, let the earth be glad; let the distant shores rejoice* (Psalm 97:1). Our heart-felt desire is that every person living on the planet gives glory and praise and adoration to our magnificent God *May the peoples praise You, O God; may all the peoples praise You.* ⁴ *May the nations be glad and sing for joy, for You rule the peoples justly and guide the nations of the earth.* ⁵ *May the peoples praise You, O God; may all the peoples praise You* (Psalm 67:3-5). Worship motivates us to catch a vision of the billions of people who one day will gather around God's throne in glory (Revelation 7:9-11). A vision that will be fulfilled because millions of Christians in each generation are bold and creative enough to find ways to share the love of God in Christ with their families; neighbours and work colleagues –no matter what the personal cost. After I close this message we will listen to the testimony of a Christian North Korean student with a passion for reaching her homeland for Jesus. The challenge for each one of us is this –how can I most effectively share my faith in Jesus by word and action in the places where He has placed me during the week and amongst the people with whom I interact with varying levels of frequency?

Jesus in Matthew 28:16-20 leaves His final words, a kind of manifesto for His followers to remember as our primary calling, our ultimate purpose for living here on earth, but this is a part of a bigger picture of a call to mission from God in the Bible. We need to keep the grander vision of God's purposes before us as we live our lives for Him.

1. God's Purpose

(a) Through Abraham (Genesis 12:2-3) Mission was not an afterthought in the mind of God. He has throughout human history had a plan for our salvation, even before He created the world. Abraham was called from worshipping idols in Iraq to serve the living God, but not only for his benefit, but for the salvation of humankind. God told Abraham in Genesis 12:2-3: *I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you... all peoples on earth will be blessed through you.* It was a New Testament vision also as Paul stated in Romans 1:5: *Through Him (Jesus) we received grace and apostleship to call people from among all the Gentiles (nations) to be obedience that comes from faith.* What is your vision for the mission of this church in our community? John Wesley once famously declared; 'The world is my parish'. Did he mean that he was responsible for witnessing to every person on the planet? No! but as the servant of a great God with a world vision he was called to step out in faith beyond his own resources and accept the incredible calling that God had given to him.

In Abraham's case it was a wealthy city dweller living a lifestyle not exceeded in this country by most people until the 20th century, to step out into a nomadic lifestyle

not knowing where he was going, living among people whose languages and cultures were different to anything he had previously experienced- but was he willing to heed the call of God? Genesis 12:4 tells us the answer: *So Abraham left, as the Lord had told him.* The same world needs the good news of the gospel; it is the same God who calls his 21st C followers to pass on the glorious message of deliverance and freedom that God has for His creation in Christ. In the 1790s Evangelical Christians began for the first time to grasp the challenge of the Great Commission –a small number had kept on fulfilling it, especially the Moravian Christians from what is now the Czech Republic, but at a time when the overwhelming majority of Christians alive lived in the UK and a small part of the eastern seaboard of the USA it was a huge step but God called and in faith these pioneers went across the globe.

(b) **Through His Servant** (Isaiah 42:6)

I the Lord have called you in righteousness; I will take hold of your hand. I will keep you and will make you to be a covenant for the people and a light to the Gentiles, to open eyes that are blind, to free captives from prison and to release from the dungeon those who sit in darkness. This was one of several prophecies given through Isaiah concerning a special servant who would come to declare God's salvation as a light in a dark world. The familiar words of Isaiah 9:2 illustrate this: *The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of the shadow of death a light has dawned.* Jesus came to demonstrate that what God was asking us to do was not only possible but the only way to live for God. It was equally a calling for Israel; Isaiah 60:1-3 declares: *Arise shine for your light has come, and the glory of the Lord rises upon you. See, darkness covers the earth and thick darkness is over the peoples, but the Lord rises upon you and His glory appears over you. Nations will come to your light and kings to the brightness of your dawn.* God's commission then and now was a practical calling for His people in every generation. The Psalms provide praises that see the aspiration of the nations coming to acknowledge the Lordship of Jesus. Psalm 47 is an exhortation to praise in anticipation of a spiritual harvest in the nations: v1 *Clap your hands, all you nations; shout to God with cries of joy..the nobles of the nations assemble as the people of Abraham... He is greatly exalted (v9).*

2. God's People (Matthew 28:16-17; Jonah 3:10-4:11)

16 Then the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had told them to go. 17 When they saw Him, they worshipped Him; but some doubted. Good news, the disciples had been told by Jesus to meet Him somewhere in Galilee and they showed up at the appointed meeting place. So far so good; Yet Matthew 28:17 is a verse that contains information so shocking that most other religions would have omitted it from their sacred texts. Our Muslim friends cannot accept that a prophet or key religious leader could make a major mistake. So when we read of the sins of Abraham or David or whoever in the Old Testament they struggle to recognise that such events could have taken place or that God could use such flawed people to accomplish His work here on earth. The Bible, by contrast, shows the people of God as they really are, which is actually in some respects an encouragement to us; if God can use people like this then maybe He can do something with me, despite all my shortcomings. Remember the context of these words, a meeting at which the risen Lord Jesus is presiding. I don't know about you, but if I had been a disciple who knew Jesus had died and was buried and then sometime later attended a service presided over by Jesus I don't think I would have been doubting during the service. I might have done so prior to meeting Him, wondering if the resurrection could really happen, but no, even though He was in charge some of those present were struggling to accept that Jesus

was alive. Now, today, most if not all of us have had our doubts and our fears, maybe someone here today is struggling with some of them. The Lord knows and understands what you are thinking. The good news is that these people were going to 'turn the world upside down' in a few weeks when the Christian Church started. The Lord uses very ordinary people to accomplish great things for Him.

Think of Jonah. He was a preacher who had been serving God faithfully in the reign of the evil ruler Jeroboam II in Israel (II Kings 14:25). Jonah, much to his personal displeasure was called to serve God overseas as a missionary to the people of the capital city (Ninevah) of their hated enemies the Assyrians. The message God had given him to pass on was not a problem, as Jonah was happy to concur with such sentiments. Jonah 1:2 stated: *Go to the great city of Nineveh and preach against it, because its wickedness has come up before me.* Jonah's problem was that he was frightened that the people might repent of their sins and seek God's forgiveness. He wanted them all to go to hell, but had such a high expectancy of people coming to faith when they heard the gospel message that he didn't want to go where God had asked him to go. Amazingly this is exactly what happened and Jonah was angry as his book later records: ¹⁰*When God saw what they did and how they turned from their evil ways, He had compassion and did not bring upon them the destruction He had threatened.* ¹*But Jonah was greatly displeased and became angry.* ²*He prayed to the Lord, O Lord, is this not what I said when I was still at home? That is why I was so quick to flee to Tarshish. I knew that you are a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abounding in love, a God who relents from sending calamity.* ³*Now, O Lord, take away my life, for it is better for me to die than to live.* ⁴*But the Lord replied, Have you any right to be angry?* ⁵*Jonah went out and sat down at a place east of the city. There he made himself a shelter, sat in its shade and waited to see what would happen to the city.* ⁶*Then the Lord God provided a vine and made it grow up over Jonah to give shade for his head to ease his discomfort, and Jonah was very happy about the vine.* ⁷*But at dawn the next day God provided a worm, which chewed the vine so that it withered.* ⁸*When the sun rose, God provided a scorching east wind, and the sun blazed on Jonah's head so that he grew faint. He wanted to die, and said, It would be better for me to die than to live.* ⁹*But God said to Jonah, Do you have a right to be angry about the vine? I do, he said. I am angry enough to die.* ¹⁰*But the Lord said, You have been concerned about this vine, though you did not tend it or make it grow. It sprang up overnight and died overnight.* ¹¹*But Nineveh has more than a hundred and twenty thousand people who cannot tell their right hand from their left, and many cattle as well. **Should I not be concerned about that great city?** (Jonah 3:10-4:11).*

What kind of people does God use? Flawed people like Jonah who was very comfortable serving faithfully in his own believing community, but reluctant to speak to people outside the faith in case they got saved! His problem was not doubting whether his prayers and preaching would 'work'; rather it was not wanting to be bothered with evangelism and having a lack of concern for people who needed the Lord. Are you here this morning thinking like Jonah? Too often in Western Christianity, because of the negative reactions from people at work or from others we witness to, it is easier just to stay quiet and not risk the flack. What kind of people does God use? People like these disciples in Galilee who have serious doubts that God will do anything through them or even more fundamental doubts about God or His work in the world. What kind of people does God use? People like you and me very ordinary people who will step out in faith and who in the medium-to-longer term will see the results of their hard work. Galatians 6:9 reminds us: *Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up.* May we resolve to be available to be His witnesses.

3. God's Plan (Romans 5:8-10; Matthew 28:19-20a)

Romans 5:8: *But God demonstrates His own love for us in this: While we were still sinners Christ died for us...for if, when we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to Him through the death of His Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through His life.* How can a perfect and holy God be just and forgive guilty sinners? You and I deserve only rejection by God –we failed to keep His perfect standards; in our place stood the perfect substitute *who bore our sins in His body on the tree* (I Peter 2:24). Instead of condemnation we receive the forgiveness of sins by grace. As Paul puts it in II Corinthians 5:21: *God made Him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God.* God's plan involves you and me. Jesus in Matthew 28:19-20a gives His answer to the question of how this plan will be put into practice: *19 Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptising 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.*(a) **Our Orders** *Therefore go* our responsibility is to take the good news to people not to expect them to come to us; Jesus doesn't need to say it again –while people still need Jesus this commission is in force. The 'how' will vary; first of all through our lives, demonstrating that what we believe works through our lives in how we behave; then through our words or at times our silence as God guides us; go where? Each of us is a missionary for Jesus in our street, our school, our place of work, in the social meetings with our friends; 90%+ of people who come to faith do so through the personal witness of someone close to them in some area of their lives. You and I are always on duty for Jesus; (b) **Our Calling** *make disciples* not converts; it is not just a discipleship course to be completed but the introduction to a way of life in a Christian community (church); and in which a person will grow and develop as a Christian; (c) **Our Context** *all nations* a world vision –not just for our families and neighbours in Broughty Ferry, but Scotland wide and across the world. We cannot do it on our own, we work as part of a local church –N.T. knows nothing of solitary Christians who are not part of a local congregation; a N.T. Christian is committed to the work of one church and not floating around between churches; a N.T. church is committed to being part of a wider network of churches with whom it works in partnership for the sake of the gospel, both in the local area, nationally and internationally; in addition special mission agencies may also be a vital part of the picture in enabling the people of God across the globe to fulfil our calling. (d) **Our Symbol** *baptism* –Romans 6:3-4: *Don't you know that all of us who were baptised into Christ Jesus were baptised into His death? We were therefore buried with Him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life.* The first step of public obedience for the new follower of Jesus is to confess the Lordship of Jesus in baptism- have you taken that step or is today the day you give Jesus 100% of your life and pledge to totally all for Jesus. (e) **Our Obligation** *teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.* Christianity is not a one hour a week activity –it is a way of life 24 hours a day 7 days a week 52 weeks a year; This is God's plan so simple but how on earth can we carry it out?

4. God's Promise (Matthew 28:18, 20b)

(a) **God's Power** *Then Jesus came to them and said; All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to Me.* We do not go in our strength but His. This is why Paul, from prison can say in Phil.4:13 *I can do all things through Him (Christ) who strengthens me.*

You and I cannot –but He can by His mighty power at work in us. Do you feel weak, inadequate and afraid to live and work for Jesus –this may be a true reflection of what we can do in our strength alone, but by faith in God through earnest and believing prayer we can accomplish great things for God. Our God is an awesome God He reigns in heaven and earth! We need at times to stop and acknowledge that: “Our God reigns”. We must reach out by faith and claim His promises and live in the light of them –often in spite of the circumstances. It is a struggle to wait to see the fulfilment of His promises very often; Think of Abraham all those years for the promised son Isaac –many years and his ups and downs times of great faith and times of trying to help God out by taking an alternative course of action. When we think of world mission we can struggle to believe that we can make a difference. Does the little I can do count? Yes it does. How can we reach the hundreds of millions in India and China who have never heard the good news of Jesus, for example? Support national Christians who despite their small numbers are making a huge difference today. Two examples, K.P. Yohannan, founder and director of the Gospel for Asia mission, began with only his immediate family who accepted a calling to evangelise in north India after a mission in his home area led by an Operation Mobilisation team in 1966. Gospel for Asia launched in 1978. By 2004 this mission alone had more than 14,000 national missionaries, operated 54 Bible Colleges with in excess of 8,000 students, and a church-planting movement that pioneers on average twelve new fellowships every day. Is this unique? The second example an American Baptist doctor in North India witnessed to a high-caste Hindu army officer G.S. Nair, who some time later through friendship and witness came to Christ in 1972. People’s Baptist Ministries began with seven men pushing a handcart with all their worldly goods on it around villages whose residents had no knowledge of Jesus. They left with almost no money or knowledge of how the future would turn out. By 2007 over 1,000 churches planted with around 100,000 people converted, baptised and active church members today as a result of this witness. [2011 1,300 local churches with 150,000 active disciples of Jesus Christ now in 27 Indian states, Nepal and Myanmar www.gsnair.org] Pastor Nair’s vision for the future was breathtaking, but having seen God at work in India in spite of huge difficulties that confidence in God was well placed. Do you need this to declare your confidence in God or to renew it afresh after a time of secret doubting? Just think of Jesus’ amazing words concerning the source of our power in ministry, in Him!

(b) **God’s Presence** *And surely I will be with you always, to the very end of the age.* For how long? **Always!** Good news you are not alone in the school playground; in the office or the office social function; or possibly as the one Christian so far in your family –Jesus is there with you to encourage and support you and keep you keeping on. We are not given a task to do and left to get on with it on our own His presence is there to uphold and support us each step of the way. In August 1906 leaders of some of the small number of North Korean Christians met to seek God to pray for revival – not caring about their denominational background –a prayer meeting that went on for **four months** and led to an extraordinary movement of the Holy Spirit convicting the Christians of sin and the following year in 1907 to the Pyongyang Revival, which the Lord had told them would be followed by great tribulation. Many thousands converted, many thousands martyred by Japanese fascists then North Korean communists with most of the survivors moving south into what is now South Korea where by the witness of these survivors this Buddhist nation is now 25% Evangelical Christian, with probably the most committed Christian communities on earth, in terms

of prayer meetings and sending people out in mission. The same God desires to work here in Scotland and promises to be with you and me. Can He count on you?

(c) **God's Provision** John 16:7-15: *7 But I tell you the truth: It is for your good that I am going away. Unless I go away, the Counsellor will not come to you; but if I go, I will send Him to you. 8 When He comes, He will convict the world of guilt in regard to sin and righteousness and judgment: 9 in regard to sin, because men do not believe in Me; 10 in regard to righteousness, because I am going to the Father, where you can see Me no longer; 11 and in regard to judgment, because the prince of this world now stands condemned. 12 I have much more to say to you, more than you can now bear. 13 But when He, the Spirit of truth, comes, He will guide you into all truth. He will not speak on His own; He will speak only what He hears, and He will tell you what is yet to come. 14 He will bring glory to me by taking from what is mine and making it known to you. 15 All that belongs to the Father is mine. That is why I said the Spirit will take from what is Mine and make it known to you.* How can we be confident in the final success of the work of God in the salvation of His church in earth? it is through the enabling power of the Holy Spirit who brings God's purposes to fruition. God calls us to exercise faith like a little child taking its parent's hand and walking side by side into the future He has prepared for us. Why can we be confident? As Joshua reminded Israel shortly prior to his death: *You know with all your heart and soul that not one of all the good promises the Lord your God gave you has failed. Every promise has been fulfilled; not one has failed* (Joshua 23:14). How can we be sure today? Jesus in John 17:20 in His high priestly prayer said: *My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in Me through their (our) message.* As soldiers in the army of God we are a people under authority. Our leader has given us our marching orders and calls us to carry them out –can He count on your obedience and mine? Jesus' church will grow throughout the world; will you play your part in fulfilling the great commission for Jesus' sake? Amen