

Matthew 28:18

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[0 : 00] We shall turn out the gospel according to Matthew chapter 28 and verse 18.

The gospel of Matthew, the last chapter, and at verse 18. And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth.

Go ye therefore, and teach all nations. Now, in those words we have, as you know, the last charge of Christ to his disciples.

A charge often known as the Great Commission. And it's very difficult to find any new angle upon a passage which is so familiar.

But it does have one interesting peculiarity. And that is that according to many scholars, it is cast in the form of a covenant.

[1 : 39] We have many examples of ancient eastern covenants. And all those covenants, biblical and extra-biblical, have a common structure.

A structure which is threefold. We find, first of all, that they have a preamble in which the sovereign party identifies himself and describes himself.

And then we have, secondly, a set of stipulations imposed by the superior. And then we have, thirdly, a promise or promises which are conditional on compliance with the stipulations.

In other words, we have this very, very simple structure. We have the preamble. We have the stipulations.

We have the promises. You'll find at once that the Great Commission possesses each of those features.

[3 : 04] It has its own preamble. All authority is given unto me in heaven and in earth. It has its own stipulation.

Go ye therefore, teach all nations. And it has its own promise. I am with you always, even to the end of the world.

And quite apart from those structural peculiarities, we also have, at least one point, deliberate allusion to the Old Testament Abrahamic covenant, where we have the language, go and teach all nations.

You'll recall that the Abrahamic covenant was one that was concerned to bring blessings through Abraham to all the nations.

And I think that we ought to be mindful of the fact that this Great Commission is rooted in the Abrahamic covenant.

[4 : 16] And that, in fact, all our evangelism is concerned to proclaim the terms of that covenant and to bring those who are outside into the enjoyment of its privileges and its blessings.

Now, I want this morning to reflect on the Great Commission from those three points of view. Its preamble, its stipulations, and its promise.

We find that, first of all, its preamble, I am the one to whom all the authority is given in heaven and in earth.

Now, we are very familiar with the idea of the sovereignty of God because that sovereignty is the great foundation of our own confessional Calvinism.

But the marvelous thing we have in the Great Commission is the way that this sovereignty is linked with the Lord Jesus Christ.

[5 : 33] The way the whole sovereignty is seen Christologically. Christ is placed at the heart of the sovereignty of God.

This sovereignty is not a demonic or satanic sovereignty. It is not an abstract or conceptual sovereignty.

It is not an impersonal sovereignty or a capricious and unpredictable sovereignty. It is always the sovereignty of God.

A sovereignty rooted in what God himself is. A sovereignty which expresses all that God is. But what's happening in the Great Commission is that the sovereignty is being rooted not only in God, the Father, God in the Old Testament, but the sovereignty is being rooted in the Lord Jesus Christ.

[6 : 51] He is placed at the very heart of the sovereignty of God. We have the same idea symbolically in Revelation 4, Revelation 7, where we have the Lamb in the midst of the throne.

In other words, John is saying to us, when you look at the sovereignty of God, there you find, right at the heart of that sovereignty, you find Jesus Christ.

The sovereignty of God is the sovereignty of Jesus. It is the sovereignty of the Lamb. It is the sovereignty of the one who is the enfleshment of God's grace and the enfleshment of God's love and the enfleshment of God's compassion.

It is the sovereignty in Christ of the wisdom of God, of the power of God, of the love of God, of the concern of God.

It is the sovereignty of the sympathy of the one who has taken our nature and can be touched with a feeling of our infirmities.

[8 : 13] That, in fact, goes right back to one of the great words of the Old Testament in Isaiah chapter 9, where we're told, and to us a child is born, and to us a son is given, and the government of the sovereignty shall be upon his shoulders.

Now, it really is of enormous importance that we see that God's sovereignty is not abstract, capricious, satanic, unpredictable, unfilling.

God's sovereignty is the sovereignty of Jesus. All the authority is mine. And God's sovereignty can never act in a way that contradicts what God is in Jesus Christ.

Now, you expand that for a moment. It means that Jesus Christ is at the heart of the foreordination of God.

God is foreordained whatsoever comes to pass. God works all things according to the counsel of his own will.

[9 : 29] God does it. And it's not the God of caprice or the God of harsh, arbitrary judgment.

It is God as he is in the Lord Jesus Christ. We don't mean by sovereignty that fate is in control. We don't mean simply whatever will be, will be. We mean Jesus reigns. We mean that Jesus foreordains.

We mean that the whole of the unfolding process of human history rolls out of the heart as out of the mind of Christ.

And that that foreordination is controlled at every point by the parameters of his love and his holiness.

[10 : 36] Christ is the God of election. Christ is the God of predestination. Christ is the God of reprobation.

There is nothing in God's predestination that violates Christ's nature.

There is nothing in God's election that violates Christ's nature. There is nothing in God's reprobation that violates Christ's nature.

It is he who has foreordained whatsoever comes to pass. He who took our nature. He who got involved.

He who beheld the city and wept over it. He who was crucified between two thieves. He is the God of foreordination.

[11 : 36] Similarly, it is he who is sovereign in creation. And we must be that sovereign in creation constantly in mind.

That when God creates, God creates sovereignly. God is not inhibited by anything that he has to work with.

There are no constraints. There are no limitations. And yet in that sovereignty, we have again the sovereignty of Jesus.

It is Jesus who creates according to his will. So that there is nothing in the created universe that is a contradiction of what God is in Christ.

Now I think again that in an age like yours that God has blessed with so much progress, especially in the realm of physics, so that we know beyond any previous generation the glories and the

mysteries of our own physical environment.

[12 : 53] It is enormously important that we see that this great creation is one that is expressive of the sovereign omnipotence of the Son of God.

It seems to me thrilling and majestic that as we probe the structures of our own world, reflect on the complexities of light and time and space in their relations the one with the other, as we probe the glories of sub-atomic existence and the glories of remote galaxies and constellations, that what we know we have everywhere is what Jesus conceived, what Jesus thought of, what Jesus spoke into being, that to which Jesus gave a body as it pleased him, that our whole universe be seen as a universe that has Christ for its author and that in some great way that I can see only dimly has Christ as the word,

Christ as the logic of God has that has him for its model. That is why there cannot last be in this universe nothing that is finally unintelligible.

There cannot last be no black hole of meaninglessness even though there can be areas of existence that we with our contemporary physics cannot possibly schematize or understand.

That's why please we cannot be afraid of research we cannot be afraid of our universe to be afraid of research is to be afraid of our universe to be afraid to ask questions is to be afraid of our universe we have no right because it is Christ's universe he was sovereign in all the glory of the love which shone so brilliantly at Calvary he was sovereign in the moment of creation but it's not only that but he is sovereign in providence sovereign in foreordination sovereign in creation sovereign in providence that is he is the one who preserves and governs all his creatures and all their actions that really is the primary point of the

[16 : 01] Lord's claim all the authority that is all the providential authority all the sovereignty in preservation all the initiatives in the unfolding drama of human and cosmic history all of these belong to Jesus Christ you remember the great vision and the revelation of Saint John when the cry is made who can open the seals of those great books of history and the universe laments because there was no one found worthy to open the books or to unloose the seals thereof and I wept much says John because no one could be found worthy but then at last the cry goes out that the lion of the tribe of Judah he is worthy to open the books and to unloose the seals thereof you've got that marbles succession of events when the lamb opens the book part of the glory is that some of the events are so appalling plagues death darkness and famine and war and persecution all those things that seem so utterly incomprehensible but they've come out of the books and who has opened the books the lamb has opened the books the lamb has the great overlord the lamb has the great sovereign who presides over the unfolding development of our history the lamb who according to

Paul and Colossians has the preeminence in all things who stands supreme over all the demonic forces and you and I must never underestimate the reality or the number or the earnest industriousness of those demonic forces we have seen in this century those forces operate with appalling destructive effectiveness but Christ is the one who at last has the authority over them as the authority over all the political forces despite the arsenals despite the armaments despite a tremendous conglomerate of military might that Christ has the whole world in his hand the king's heart is in the hand of the lord and he turns it as a river of water he stands supreme over all those demonic forces over all those political forces he stands supreme over every human heart we find it so beautifully in the story of

Lydia of whom we are told whose heart the lord opened there was a heart closed by prejudice closed I'm sure by the apparent glory of our own religiousness the glory of our own piety shut out Christ and yet the lord comes and in one single effortless flush the lord opens the heart and all the barriers are down and there is total openness and total responsiveness to the gospel as preached by the apostle Paul and there is surely in Paul himself another great symbol another great monument of the same sovereignty of grace

Paul in his obstinacy the greatest threat to the Christian faith that this world has ever seen that man whose virulent and implacable and brilliant antagonism almost strangled the church of God in the cradle but Christ shows that even that heart in all its pride in all its arrogance in all its demonic enmity against God in one moment that heart too is broken the demonic forces and their aggregate and their organization yet they yield to the lamb the political forces in all their pretensions to autonomy and all their ability to accumulate enormous arsenals these yield in a moment to Christ and the heart of individual men in all their pride in all their obstinacy in all their spiritual blindness

they yield in a moment to Jesus

Christ now it seems to me that we should pause on the threshold of this great commission it seems to me that we should pause on the threshold of all our evangelism and we should look up because we are far too inclined to make a mad run and a mad dash at the fence of gospel proclamation with our eyes closed hoping for the best and hoping that it's not an abyss we find at the other side just as when we pray we begin with a great solemn icing and inspiring recollection our father which art in heaven we do not rush in we do not simply think of need and think of problems and think of our own petitions but we pause and we look up it is the same in this great and terrible business of gospel proclamation we must stand and stop and pause and look up all the authority is given unto me it must begin in recollection it must begin in devotion and you will please note how tremendously theological is christian practice her right here the very heart of her praxis the very heart of her practice right there there is the sovereignty of god and all the praxis will follow and flow from that sovereignty and we shall never have the right motivation and we shall never have the right orientation or consolation or hope or aspiration until we do stand and look up and realize as we preach give out our tracts to our lord and all recitation all the authority is the lambs that is impressed indelibly upon our own minds that that conviction that conviction and the devotion that follows from the conviction the sense of awe and wonder of love and praise and gratitude that are the enjoying response to the magnificence of the lamb in the midst of the throne that is where evangelism begins [25 : 33] I put it to you in other words that evangelism does not begin with a vision of human need it begins with a vision of the sovereignty of Christ but I put it to you furthermore that the great reason for our inadequacy and for our unfaithfulness in this whole department it's not as we so often imagine that we lack an awareness of human need the reason is not as many of you might fondly imagine a surfeit of theology the reason please is that we have not seen the throne we have not seen the majesty we have not seen the commissioning

Christ and I could take you today on the basis of God's word to every one of those great preachers and each of them began his ministry in a vision a sire began his in a vision I beheld the Lord high and lifted up a sire began his in a vision that great vision of the wheels with which his prophecy opens Paul began his in a vision as he tells the Galatian church so magnificently it pleased God to reveal the son in me that I might preach him among the Gentiles they all had a mission and I would want today for myself and you that we might come back to that and not not only to the declining statistics of the free church of Scotland not only to the escalating problems social and moral of our own poor land but I would want us up up to this great mountain top up to this point where we see Jesus all authority is given unto me and it is only out of that terrible vision of the glory of God only out of that that an evangelist can come where there is no vision the people perish and we have to ask God today to get us up to that same place Lord show us the lamb in the midst of the throne and it is on that basis on the basis of what I may still technically call a preamble there never was such a preamble as this it is on the basis of that preamble that the stipulation rests and the stipulation is this go therefore what a marvelous stipulation it is and I'm just going to rush through it very quickly you will see at once it is a stipulation that demands an aggressive evangelist a going evangelist now there is another kind of evangelism what might be called an attractive evangelism evangelism one that says you provide the word and the building and God will provide the people one that says set up open your doors and the people will come it operates on an alleged principle of attraction and that principle is a very effective principle if you want to open a public house or an off license or a bingo hall you put up your building you open your doors and you attract it but it will not work for the

Christian gospel because the carnal mind is enmity against God and that's why God says go that's why evangelism is not sitting and waiting it is going it must challenge human sin it must attack human society it must go at the people go that's what God says go into the highways and hedges into the world's riches and the world's poverty into the world's slums and the world's suburbia you must go and it is Christ's almost expansive imperative go we have no right to remain who we are they were told to begin at Jerusalem that doesn't mean that they sat in out in Jerusalem it means that they went at

Jerusalem that means that they moved beyond Jerusalem and our evangelism similarly must be an aggressive evangelism you will see again this that our evangelism is rooted directly in the sovereignty of God and I come back at it again go therefore I'm saying it for this reason that by some perverse logic that I cannot understand people have made the sovereignty of God an excuse

for not evangelizing you all know that when William Carey sought to be a missionary to India his local church elders said to him very very sternly young man if God wants to evangelize [33 : 07] India he doesn't need you there the sovereignty of God has become fatalism now what I see and hear is this I see the lamb in the midst of the throne I see him clothed with the insignia of sovereignty I see glory I see majesty and I hear a voice a voice as the noise in many waters and as I listen to that voice which is the voice of the sovereign God I hear that voice speaking imperiously speaking in the measured tones of cosmic sovereignty and speaking unambiguously and I hear that sovereign voice saying go and can

I say to God Lord I believe in your sovereignty so I'm not going when the sovereignty is himself saying to me go I have in this therefore the therefore of consolation and the therefore of encouragement that because Jesus reigns then there is meaning in my inarticulate whisperings and stammerings of the gospel I know there is meaning in my throwing the seed on the pavement and my telling the dead to walk and the blind to see there is meaning because Christ is in control but today the therefore that impresses me the therefore

I want to preach is the therefore of the blasphemy that says to God Lord I'm not going because you are sovereign but instead it is the sovereignty that means I go I go because he is sovereign because God has told me I must go so I want go I really want go I want the church to go I want the church to go what this land devours in its culture and its theology and its churches and its industry and its society I want the church to go at every level of its population because God says I reign you go therefore and yet you will notice I want not only go I want go teach because there again it is so terribly easy for us to have go and not to have teaching go and teach go make disciples of all the nations go and engage in this great battle for the mind for the mind go and argue and go and reason and go and inform and go and persuade that's what God said go tell them the message of the enfleshment of God and Christ tell them the message that God has borne sin and God has dealt with sin and cross go and tell them of the new birth go and tell them of justification by faith alone go and tell them of judgment and eternity go and tell them that they must believe and they must repent go with the great doctrines go with the mystery and then

I say Lord in 1982 people don't understand theology and people won't listen to mysteries and people have no time for doctrines so I'll go tell them stories and I'll go strum guitars and I still say look the one who said go said go teach and whether man will heal or whether man will forbear I can only give them God's message we are ambassadors for Christ as though God did beseech you by us we pray you in Christ's dead will you reconcile to God and then he goes on he made him who knew no sin to be sin for us and if you ask me what should go into your tracts and what should we preach at the street corners then I say you preach

[39 : 21] God made him who knew no sin to be sin for us that we might become in him God's righteousness I have said before that the only criterion I care for as far as the means of communication is concerned is that the vehicle and the vessel can carry the gospel and to the extent that you can sing the gospel then you sing the extent in which you can strum the gospel then you strum it and the extent in which you can illustrate that gospel pictorially then you do it but it must be gospel go teach and it's in the terrible tragedy that we have churches with goal which have no teaching and churches with teaching which have no goal and how before

God can I get this great synthesis of going and teaching go ye therefore and teach go teach and there is something more than that is this baptizing and all I want to build on that point is this that the proclamation can never be dispassionate it can never be indifferent to the response with which it meets in other words we are not in a business simply of going or the business simply of teaching but in the business of baptizing go baptize and I say but Lord there are no there are no converts that haven't been converts for years that haven't been converts anywhere and we thank thee Lord that we are called to be faithful and not be successful and for many many years I've found refuge in that cave but I can find refuge in it no more because the great commission and its stipulation is about baptizing and I said that's a covenant and I'll come back to that and if there are no baptisms if there are no converts then I've got to ask the Lord Lord how long I've got to ask the Lord what's wrong with my message what's wrong with the way I proclaim it what's wrong with our congregations from the threshold to the pulpit that there are no baptisms

I want go and I want teaching and I want baptisms I want a situation where God is keeping his covenant I want a situation where the word of God is bringing people to the birth I want a situation where pastors and elders are not strangers to the obstetrics of the spirit I want a situation where

day after day they're dealing with people who have been brought to the birth go teach baptize and you see the glory of this inspired word of God there's something after that and what can it possibly be after going teaching baptizing well marvelously what comes after that again in verse 20 is teaching go teach baptize teach not the same word not even the same kind of teaching but still teaching you see so often we are brought to the birth and the people who have been up to that moment evangelistic fodder to be got at they are simply seen then once they're converted as evangelizing agencies now witness is enormously important but it is a terrible tragedy that so many people think once they're converted that's it the Lord's order is there must be teaching before baptism in order to conversion and there must be teaching after baptism with a view to spiritual growth and edification and just to show you again something of the glory of this word it's my privilege to expound what kind of teaching should the converts be getting it's teaching about human behavior about human conduct about human relationships it's teaching about commandments teaching about the law about life about practice it's almost an inversion of our standard practice that you give the law to the unconverted and the theology to the initiated and I put it to you that the Bible's approach is so different the Bible has a massively theological evangelism incarnation atonement justification and then its whole post conversion pastoral care is predominantly concerned with the law with as the Lord himself says it here teach them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you and I would really urge it that those of you who are converted should take that to heart that while we continue to probe the mysteries of revelation yet let's ensure that we give due attention to this tremendous need that we have to understand God's will for the way that we ought to be conducting yourselves

[47 : 17] I've got to move on and lead us to a very summary conclusion we have the preamble we have the stipulation we have the promise I am with you always I am with you all the days to the end of the world now there are two things first is this that as you go evangelizing this is your great comfort I am with you now look it's a terrible thing but when we see Christians ill when we see believers in trouble when we see God's church in the valley of the shadow of death we say to them take courage God is with you but you see a believer witnessing you see a preacher evangelizing you see a team or a group to door to door visitation or someone in the hall of residence pleading with his fellow students to come to the means of grace to the word of

God that person looks terribly alone nobody ever comforts take courage God is with you if that man were in some principle everybody would say to him God is with you but here he is making a fool of himself for Christ and would never say to him God is with you and yet that's a promise that as we evangelize as we go teach I am with you all the days but you see at once my second point and that is this that God's presence is conditional I am with you when you evangelize I am with you if and I say again if you evangelize and if you do not evangelize I am not with you because this is a covenant if we violate its basic stipulation there is no presence of God in our midst if we are a sitting church then we violate God's stipulation if we are a non teaching church we violate God's stipulation and I can say with all the confidence and revelation warms Ichabod the glory has departed and I want us to aid to our hearts there are many churches that have a communicant's role and a long list of adherents they have the requisite office bearers and they have what they think is confessional fidelity but they have no goal and

I would venture my soul on it too Christ is not with them because when we violate his stipulation the promise fails or let me turn it otherwise the moment we violate his stipulation we cease to be beneficiaries of the covenant promise and become victims of the covenant anathema we become victims of the covenant anathema and I ask you how many non witnessing Christians are under the covenant anathema and how many non going congregations are under the covenant anathema because you are neither hot nor cold

I will spew you out of my mouth so there it is go teach now the time is gone and I must close let us pray oh lord our blessed god we bless thee for the joy of thy word for its depth for its unpredictability for the wealth for the manifoldness of its teaching glory give us oh lord the grace that we may look up and see the lamb in the midst of the throne grant oh lord that we may respond to the word that says go teach and that we may tremble as we realize that thy presence is conditional upon our obedience.

[53 : 31] May we realize, O Lord, beyond that that if we persist in our disobedience then the presence which was our expected blessing becomes our curse.

I repent or I come quickly. Lord grant us the parousia and the presence of thy comfort lest we come to know the parousia and the presence of thine anathema for our Savior's sake. Amen.
Amen. Our closing praise is Psalm 72 the last three stanzas the tuner's warwick Psalm 72 from verse 17 His name forever shall endure His name forever shall endure Thus by God's son it shall
Then shall be blessed in Him and blessed all His throne shall be loved
How blessed be the Lord our God God etapa God bless you.
The whole earth let his glory fill. Amen, so let it be.