

THE MISSION

“Part 4: To the Nations”

Matthew 28:18-20

By David A. Ritchie

November 3, 2019 (Ordinary Time, Family Sunday)

Scripture Reading

“And Jesus came and said to them, ‘All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age’”
(Matthew 28:18–20, ESV).

Introduction

As a church family, we have been exploring the mission of Redeemer Christian Church.

That mission is this:

Redeemer Christian Church exists to declare the gospel of Jesus Christ with our words and display the gospel of Jesus Christ with our lives to our neighbors and to the nations.

In this sermon series, we are unpacking what this mission statement means, how this mission flows from the word of God, and what this mission looks like in real life.

Thus far, we have talked about what it means to declare the gospel with our words and display the gospel with our lives. We’ve talked about what it looks like to take this mission to our neighbors. And today, we will conclude this series by talking about what it means to take this mission *“To the Nations.”*

Teaching and Exhortation

1.) God’s Plan for the Nations

Where do we get the idea from the Bible that God cares about the nations? How long has it been a part of the design of God’s people to care about the nations?

Many people might point to Matthew 28, the passage we just read, as the origin of God’s plan for the nations. As we look deep into the words of Scripture, I want to show you that God’s care for the nations is not a new idea that was brought about only in the New Testament or after the coming of Jesus. In fact, if you look closely at the book of Genesis

– the first book of the Bible – you will see very quickly that God’s *Plan A* of redemption was always for the nations.

The word “genesis” literally means “beginning.” And that is what the book of Genesis is all about. It is about the beginning of the cosmos, the beginning of humanity, and tragically, it is about the beginning of sin.

The first eleven chapters of the book of Genesis vividly illustrate how sin has an unraveling effect on God’s good creation. With Adam and Eve, we witness how sin unravels marriages. With Cain and Abel, we witness how sin unravels families and human life. With Noah and the flood, we witness how sin unravels societies and even creation. And with the Tower of Babel, we witness how sin unravels and divides the nations of the world.

But just as Genesis is about the beginning of sin, Genesis is also about the beginning of redemption. That plan of redemption begins to unfold with a man named Abraham. Abraham was once a man living in a pagan city. But God calls him. He blesses him. He sets him apart. And God promises to give Abraham a family that will grow into a nation. That nation, later known as Israel, will be God’s chosen and blessed people.

Thus, the nation of Israel was chosen from all other nations to be God’s holy nation. However, God’s choosing of Israel was never meant to be just about Israel. Rather, God had a plan to use Israel in a special way to bring about redemption and blessing to all nations. This goes all the way back to the call of Abraham in Genesis 12: *“Now the LORD said to Abram, ‘Go from your country and your kindred and your father’s house to the land that I will show you. And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed’”* (Gen. 12:1–3, ESV).

In other words, Abraham’s family, and specifically the nation of Israel that came through Abraham’s family, was designed to be the means through which God would rescue and redeem all nations of the world from the power of sin.

In the Old Testament, we see glimpses of how this might come about. During the golden age of King Solomon’s reign, the kingdom of Israel was a blessed nation with great power and prosperity. God’s presence dwelt among his people in the temple of Jerusalem. Solomon was a king who was internationally renowned for his wisdom and just judgment. People from many nations, including kings and queens, came to Jerusalem to marvel at the majesty of this kingdom.

Through Israel’s blessing, the people of the nations were coming to a knowledge of God. As the Psalmist sings: *“May God be gracious to us and bless us and make his face to shine upon us, that your way may be known on earth, your saving power among all nations. Let the peoples praise you, O God; let all the peoples praise you! Let the nations be glad and sing for joy, for you judge the peoples with equity and guide the nations upon earth”* (Ps. 67:1–4, ESV).

But it didn't last. The same sin that unraveled God's good creation in Genesis unraveled the kingdom of Israel. First came division. Then came destruction and exile. How could God's blessed people be a blessing to the nations if the kingdom of God's people were destroyed?

The New Testament answers that question. Through the line of descendants of the long-lost kings of Israel, a child is born in Bethlehem.

Jesus Christ, God in human flesh, comes and dwells among us. He declares the good news of the kingdom of God. He displays the power and love of God in his life. He lives a perfectly righteous life. He dies a horrific death on the cross. And he rises again from the dead so that all who believe in him – *no matter what nation they come from* – might live. From Abraham's family comes Jesus, and Jesus is a blessing to all nations and all families of the earth.

God's plan to redeem the nations never changes. But how that mission of redemption takes place does change. Now, instead of the nations needing to come to Jerusalem to visit the people of God, the people of God are sent from Jerusalem into the nations to proclaim the good news of God's kingdom: *"... you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth"* (Acts 1:8, ESV).

2.) God's Power for the Nations

In light of God's plan for the nations, let's take a deeper look at our Scripture reading for today. Jesus says to his disciples: *"...All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age"* (Mt. 28:18–20, ESV).

Jesus has just risen from the dead. He has accomplished all that is necessary for our redemption. Through the cross and empty grave, Jesus has dethroned the power of sin and death. All power in heaven and earth has been rightfully reclaimed by Jesus.

And what will he do with this authority?

He commissions and empowers his disciples to go and make more disciples. He commissions his people to go and invite people to be immersed (βαπτίζοντες) in the life of the Triune God. He commands his followers to proclaim good news of who Jesus is, what Jesus has accomplished, and how we must live in light of Jesus.

And ever since he first said these words 2000 years ago, *this has been the task of the church as the people of God*. We are a people who live between the ages – the age of sin and the age of redemption. Sin still exists. It is part of our reality and every-day experience. The New Testament is very clear about this. But the reign of sin has been dealt a fatal blow through Jesus.

Jesus's kingdom has already come in the life of his people, and one day Jesus will return to make all things new. But until that day comes, we have a mission.

And this mission is explicitly to “all nations” (πάντα τὰ ἔθνη).

For this reason, in the book of Acts, the church very quickly becomes a multi-ethnic group of people, and it gets the attention of the world. The gospel had the power to break boundaries that had never been broken before. People who were once divided racially, culturally, and historically were calling one another brothers and sisters in Christ (see Acts 11:19-25; Gal. 3:28; Eph. 2:11-22).

For this reason, Christianity is the only major world religion that is not geographically bound and ethnically oriented. It has moved from culture to culture, continent to continent. And it is still on the move.

The point of all of this is that the gospel is never meant to be a blessing that stops with the existing people of God. It is not enough for the church just to sit around and talk about what Mt. 28 says. The church is called to participate in Mt. 28 commands. We are to go to the nations with the power and authority of Christ himself!

So, who are the “nations”? We tend to think of nations as people who belong to a certain country or nation-state. But from a biblical standpoint, a “nation” is any group of people who share a common experience or culture. That common experience for a nation can involve race or nationality. But in the New Testament sense, a nation can be a group of people who are similar in their cultural mindset or a common set of challenges. For our purposes, a “nation” is any people-group that needs to be reached with the gospel of Jesus Christ.¹

In the early days of replanting this church, there was a relatively small remnant of people who provided the core of what would become Redeemer Christian Church. In those days, we didn't have a lot of money, resources, or man-power. But what we did have was a tremendous opportunity to give everything we had for the mission of God.

In those days, I would pose a question to the church. I would ask: “Do we want to be a church that seeks to meet the collective preferences of the people who already go to this church? Or do we want to be a church that seeks to reach the people in our city who do not yet go to this church?” In other words, will we be a people who go to the nations?

By the grace of God, we have been a church that has gone to the nations. We have gone to seek people groups who need the gospel, and there are many of those people groups who live right here in this city.

¹ Georg Bertram and Karl Ludwig Schmidt, “Ἔθνος, Ἐθνικός,” ed. Gerhard Kittel, Geoffrey W. Bromiley, and Gerhard Friedrich, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964–), 364–371.

I'll give you just a few examples of some people groups we are engaging right now.

One group of people that we have been engaging with the gospel has been college students. Mack Buchanan is one of our deacons, and he leads what we call **Redeemer College Mission**. College students are a people-group. From a New Testament standpoint, they are a type of "nation." They share a similar culture and experience, and they often share similar questions and struggles. Often times, they can be overlooked or written off by the church. Often times, media can even foster animosity toward college students by patronizing them or talking down to them, and we are just not going to do that here.

We have always been a church that wants to reach college students. We want to engage their questions and create an environment where they can connect to one another in gospel-centered community. College is a time when people are often forming their worldview, and if that worldview is formed by the gospel, college students will often give the rest of their lives to serving God. I know this because I became a Christian at age nineteen on a college campus.

Another way we go to the nations in our own city is through **Refugee Language Project**. A lot of times, U.S. citizens tend to think about refugees as one big people group. But the truth is that the refugees who live here are people from multiple different nations, who had to flee their home country for one reason or another. Through RLP, we are not just reaching refugees. We are building bridges to the Karen, the Chen, Southern Sudanese, Northern Sudanese, and Somali people groups. All of these groups are nations. Some of those people are here because they were persecuted for being Christians. Some of them are not Christians, but because they are here, they now have the opportunity to encounter Christians and witness the gospel being declared and displayed.

One "nation" in our city that we have begun to reach in recent years is families who have special needs children. It is, in many ways, an unreached people group that is often shunned and ignored by many churches. But we have developed a ministry called **"Wonderfully Made."** And through this ministry, we have reached multiple families as a church.

We are a church that is reaching the nations, even before we have to leave our city. But with that said, I don't want us ever to think that we have to make a choice between local and the global aspect of our mission.

In the New Testament, there are expressions of both local and international mission (cf. Acts 1:8). Local churches met the needs of their local communities, but they also sent out missionaries to preach the gospel and plant churches (Acts 4:32-37; 6:1-7; 13:1-3).

This is why we promote the **Perspectives** course. This is why we go to **Mexico** to build houses and to **Taiwan** to teach English. It is why we support **Crisis Aid** in all the work they do to combat human trafficking in Ethiopia. And it is why we work with **Christian Relief Fund**, particularly the work they do in Kenya.

In fact, in the early years of Redeemer Christian Church, I asked one of our elders Milton Jones how we could help with what Christian Relief Fund is doing in Kenya, with all their water wells, schools, and feeding programs that they do for aids orphans.

He said, “Well, I know that Redeemer really wants to be a church that plants other churches. So, I tell you what: let’s work together to plant a church in Eldoret, Kenya that will serve as the base-camp for all our mission activity in Kenya.” So, our elders prayed about it, and we decided we would help start a church in Kenya. Its name is Redeemer Christian Church of Eldoret **(Cycle through the pictures of RCC Eldoret).**

I told Milton last week that I wanted to give you an update on RCC Eldoret, and here is what he had to say. *“Redeemer Christian in Eldoret is everything you would want it to be. Redeemer in Amarillo has supported it to have a pastor and a building. Redeemer Eldoret is getting to be the size of Redeemer Amarillo. It has hundreds of members. The last time I was there it had about 40 baptisms. This is the church where Francis Bii regularly preaches. They have started a school for orphaned and destitute children. They have also planted three churches. Charles, the former pastor of Redeemer, left Redeemer to plant a church in Langas in the heart of the biggest slum in Eldoret. The church has already grown to a couple of hundred people and just acquired a building gifted by people from Amarillo. Indeed, Redeemer Eldoret is the African version of Redeemer Amarillo. They send their love and greetings. And they thank you a trillion times for your support.”*

What I want you to see is this: we have been blessed as a church, and we are called to use that blessing to bless the nations. We are doing this in our city. We are doing this in our world. This is an essential part of our DNA at Redeemer. The gospel is going forth with power.

3.) God’s Purpose for the Nations

What is the end-game of all this? What is the ultimate reason for all the stuff we are doing, and all the stuff the church has been doing throughout the centuries? The ultimate purpose of our mission is the worship of Jesus! Worship is God’s purpose for the nations. As Dr. John Piper once famously said, *“Mission exists where worship does not.”*

This is why we must respond to the mission. This is why we serve. This is why we give financially. This is why we are working on training you, equipping you, and getting you to be a part of our leadership pipeline. This is why we plant and replicate Gospel Communities. This is why we plant churches and go on mission trips. This is why we declare the gospel with our words and display the gospel with our lives is so that people who do not yet know Jesus would come to worship Jesus!

In the book of Revelation, the Apostle John sees one of the most overwhelmingly beautiful visions in all of Scripture. It is a picture of the destiny to where the story of history is headed. This from Revelation 7: **“After this I looked, and behold, a great**

multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, with palm branches in their hands, and crying out with a loud voice, 'Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!' And all the angels were standing around the throne and around the elders and the four living creatures, and they fell on their faces before the throne and worshiped God, saying, 'Amen! Blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honor and power and might be to our God forever and ever! Amen' (Revelation 7:9–12, ESV).

Do you know what gives profound joy to my soul? It is that out of that massive multitude from all nations that cannot be numbered, there will be individual souls who are there because God reached them through this church. And we get to be a part of that.

We have a big vision, composed of multiple moving pieces. But it always comes down the one – the one life touched by God.

About eighteen months ago, I had the privilege of going to Montemorelos, Mexico, just outside of Monterrey for a medical mission trip with a ministry called ChOSEN (Christian Ophthalmic Surgical Expedition Network). This is a ministry founded by Dr. Ryan Rush and Christi, who both attend Redeemer, and it is a ministry we proudly financially support.

Several times a year, ChOSEN organizes teams of surgeons, surgical technicians, pastors, and translators to Mexico to provide the highest quality of eye surgeries for hundreds of people who would otherwise never receive care. And through this platform, the pastors are able to share the hope of the gospel to every single patient that comes through the operation room. The week I was there, 620 surgeries were performed.

It was such a privilege to share the gospel and talk to the patients, but by far, the patient that impacted me the most was a man named Leobardo. Leobardo came to the hospital on the last day of surgeries. I first noticed him when I saw one of the nurses placing him in a wheelchair. Both of his eyes were filled with white cataracts that you could clearly see without a microscope. Other than a very fuzzy peripheral vision, he was completely blind. But even more, Leobardo was paralyzed from the waist down. He could not move his legs, and because of this anytime his wheelchair was moved, it took two people: one to push and one to pick up his legs so that they were not run over.

As I came closer to this man, I noticed that he was staring into the distance in a catatonic stupor. Drool was coming out of his mouth and onto his chest, and I saw and smelled the adult diaper beneath his gown. He was sitting next to a group of people who were being talked to by the other pastor on the trip. Still, he was totally non-responsive, so much so that I thought he might be deaf or mentally handicapped.

I asked Christi Rush to come with me to see if we could visit him. And when she touched his shoulder and greeted him, he seemed shocked and surprised. We told him who we were. We told him why we came. We told him that we had come to give the gift of

eyesight, but that there was another gift that we wanted everyone in the hospital to know about – the gift of eternal life in Jesus.

I told Leobardo that it was very obvious that he had been through some very tough times. I said, “I want you to know, even when you can’t see God, God sees you. Even in your pain, he has known you, and today he wants you to feel his love for you.”

In that moment, Leobardo began to weep and sob. He told us how he had lost the use of his legs due to a spinal injury in his home. He told us about how his wife had died. And he told us how, once he became blind, his adult daughter and son-in-law had to take care of him every meal and every time he used the bathroom.

Leobardo is the type of man that no insurance or government would want to pay for his healthcare. What’s the point they would ask? Many would think his life is as good as gone. But on that day, Leobardo knew he was loved by God. He knew that he was made in the image and likeness of God, and that his soul is of infinite worth.

And, the next day, when we saw him with his bandage removed and his sight restored, he said something that I haven’t been able to forget: “Now I know that God has not forgotten me.”

You may feel like if someone could see your soul, you would look like Leobardo. The truth is that Leobardo is a picture of all our souls outside of Christ. But I want you to know that no matter who you are, God hasn’t forgotten you either. He has given us amazing grace. And he wants to use our lives to give that grace to the world.

I believe there are many people just like Leobardo who need to hear the gospel declared and see the gospel displayed. This is our opportunity.

Redeemer Christian Church, may we declare the gospel of Jesus Christ with our words. May we display the gospel of Jesus Christ to our neighbors and to the nations. AMEN.

Gospel Community Discussion Starters

- 1.) Have you ever been on an international mission trip? If so, describe your experience. What did this experience teach you about the mission of God?
- 2.) Read Gen. 12:1-3, Ps. 67:1-4; Mt. 28:18-20, and Acts 1:8. What do these passages reveal about the people of God and their relationship to “the nations”?
- 3.) From a biblical perspective, a “nation” is any people group that needs to be reached with the gospel of Jesus Christ. What are some ways that you have seen the church faithfully reach the nations?
- 4.) Read Rev. 7:9-12. What does this passage teach us about the ultimate purpose of our mission?

The Mission (known as The Mission UK in the United States) are an English gothic rock band formed in 1986. Initially known as The Sisterhood, the band was started by frontman Wayne Hussey and bassist Craig Adams (both from The Sisters of Mercy), soon adding drummer Mick Brown (Red Lorry Yellow Lorry) and guitarist Simon Hinkler (Artery and Pulp). Aside from Hussey, the line-up has changed several times during the years and the band has been on hiatus twice. The Mission. 100K likes. Official Page for British Alternative Rock band THE MISSION (The Mission UK) www.themissionuk.com - updated by the band & MWIS... Formed in late 1985 by Wayne Hussey, Craig Adams, Simon Hinkler, and Mick Brown, The Mission became See More. CommunitySee All. Share this Rating. Title: The Mission (1986). 7,4/10. Want to share IMDb's rating on your own site? Jeremy Irons plays a Spanish Jesuit who goes into the South American wilderness to build a mission in the hope of converting the Indians of the region. Robert DeNiro plays a slave hunter who is converted and joins Irons in his mission. When Spain sells the colony to Portugal, they are forced to defend all they have built against the Portuguese aggressors. Written by mattbballman17.