



Today we're concluding our Trending Now series. We've talked about everything from politics to technology; from immigration and race to ecology and the environment. Our last topic probably doesn't fit. I mean, how is "Unreached Peoples" a Trending Now topic? I'll answer that question in the course of my message. Obviously, we're talking about evangelism and missions. So maybe I should just start with a question: How do you feel about telling others about Jesus? How do you feel about sharing the gospel?

It reminds me of a story I heard. The abbot of a monastery called a novice into his office and told him to give the homily at the next morning's chapel. Well, the novice was scared to death. He had the classic fear of public speaking and there was no way he was going to do it; but the abbot insisted.

So the next morning, chapel came. He stood in the pulpit. All the monks were there. His hands were trembling. His knees were knocking. His voice was quivering. There was a long pause before he spoke, and then he asked a question: "Do you know what I'm going to say?" They had no idea, so all of their heads went back and forth in unison. He said, "Neither do I. Let's stand for the benediction."

The abbot didn't appreciate this. So he called the guy into his office and said, "You must do this. It's for your own good. Tomorrow is your day again. Be prepared, and this time do it right."

The next day was almost a repeat of the day before. All the monks sat there. His hands shook. His knees knocked. His voice quivered. Long pause. "Do you know what I'm going to say?" he asked. Well, after what happened the day before, they had a pretty good idea. So all of their heads went, Yes, we know what you're going to say. So he said, "Then there's no need to tell you. Let's stand for the benediction."

Now the abbot was really angry. He brought the young man into his office and said, "If you do that again, you'll be in solitary confinement, bread and water for 30 days. Tomorrow give the message and do it right!"

The next day everyone was there to see what he'd say. But again, almost an exact repeat. He stood, knees knocking, voice quivering. After a pause, he asked, "Do you know what I'm going to say?" This time, half of them nodded their heads up and down. But the other half recalled the switch from the first day to the

second, and they weren't sure what he'd say; so they shook their heads back and forth.

The novice observed this and then said, "Let those who know tell those who don't. Let us stand for the benediction."

I think that's a pretty solid definition of evangelism: those who know telling those who don't. It's not perfect but maybe it changes how you feel about sharing your faith.

You may wonder why evangelism and what we call missions is so important. To explain that we should go to another story, this one found in Matthew's Gospel. If you go to the very end (chapter 28) you'll see Jesus talking about these things with his disciples. Listen to the story in Matthew 28:16–20.

Then the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had told them to go. When they saw him, they worshiped him; but some doubted. Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."

The Priority: This Commission is of Utmost Importance

One of the things you can't miss is how, according to Matthew, this is the very last thing Jesus said to his disciples. That tells me something about how important this meeting and what was said there was. As a writer or speaker, the two most critical things are how you start and how you end your message. It's like when you jump on a plane to fly somewhere, when do most crashes take place? Take off and landing, right? It's the same way in any message. No doubt he saved this for last because of its importance.

You can also see this in how Matthew sets this up in his gospel. Before Jesus was crucified and raised, he said to his disciples, "*This very night you will all fall away on account of me, for it is written: 'I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock will be scattered.'* But after I have risen, I will go ahead of you *into Galilee*" (Matt. 26:31–32). Hmm. It seems like something important was going to happen in Galilee.

Then after the resurrection, when two women visited the tomb and found it empty, an angel said to them, "**He is not here; he has**

risen, just as he said. Come and see the place where he lay. Then go quickly and tell his disciples: 'He has risen from the dead and is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see him.' Now I have told you" (Matt. 28:6-7).

Again, this meeting was a big deal. Imagine the resurrected Jesus saying to you, "We have an appointment in Galilee. Be there!" I think you'd show up. I think you'd go and listen carefully to what he said.

The reason what he says here is so important is because this is why Jesus came in the first place. After his life-changing encounter with a crooked tax collector named Zaccheaus, Jesus declared, *"Today salvation has come to this house, because this man, too, is a son of Abraham. For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost"* (Luke 19:9-10). You see, that's his mission. That's why he came. So the very least we could say is if we want to be Jesus-followers this should be really important to us to. It should be the highest priority.

The People: This Commission is for All Disciples

Now there's a lot of ways Jesus could have gone about reaching lost people. After all, he's the Son of God! But what we see here is he chooses to have those who know tell those who don't. In other words, he chooses people to reach people. And that means us. This commission isn't just for his first century disciples with halos around their heads; this is for every generation of believers since then. Notice he says this should happen "to the very end of the age." That means this commission is for every generation of Christ-followers until he returns.

Some of you might be thinking, "Well, not everyone is called to do that. Isn't that just for missionaries?" Sometimes this is based on a misunderstanding. Here in Matthew 28 Jesus says, "Go!" We hear that and think, "Well, not everyone can go." But that's not really what he says. There's only one command in this commission, and that's to "make disciples." Many of our English translations mislead us because they begin with "go" as if that's the command. But, quite literally, this should be translated, "Therefore, as you're going, make disciples of all nations." The emphasis isn't on the **going**, it's on the **making**. You don't have to go anywhere to obey this; you don't have to be a cross-cultural missionary; but as you go to work, as you go shopping, as you go about your life, make disciples.

Still others of you might be thinking, "I get that, but still I don't have the gift of evangelism." But, do you know what? You don't have to be a gifted evangelist to tell someone what the Lord has done in your life. We may not all be gifted evangelists, but we're all witnesses. What is a witness? It's just someone who tells what they've seen and experienced and believe to be true. That's all you have to do. It's been said evangelism is just one beggar telling another beggar where to find bread.

I love how Matthew says, *"When they saw him, they worshiped him; but some doubted."* That tells me these guys were a mixed bag just like I am. We worship him and doubt him at the same time. But he still calls us to be his witnesses.

The Promise: This Commission is Based on Two Great Promises

The great thing about this is it's all sandwiched between a great affirmation on the one hand and a great promise on the other. This is where our confidence comes from. The great affirmation is this: "All authority in the universe has been given to me." That's a staggering claim. Matthew is writing his Gospel just one generation after the crucifixion of Jesus. Here a man crucified as a state criminal claims to be the one before whom Caesar himself will bow. He's the Lord not just of the church but of the whole universe. That's the confession of faith the early Christians made when they were baptized—Jesus Christ is Lord. It's more than just a personal statement; it's a cosmic statement of supreme and universal Lordship. And this commission flows out of that great affirmation. That word "therefore" links the great affirmation with this Great Commission. It's because Jesus is Lord of the nations that we have a mission to the nations.

But there's also a great promise at the end: *"And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."* Jesus promises his empowering Spirit, his presence, to us his church if we're willing to obey him. This is not a promise we can take out of context and apply to any situation. This is a promise we can claim only if we're seeking to obey Jesus, to be his disciples, and to fulfill this commission. You see, because of this great affirmation and this great promise, we have no reason to be intimidated or afraid!

The Purpose: This Commission is to Make Disciples of All Nations

But exactly what is it Jesus sends us to do? We see the command is to "make disciples." What's a disciple? A disciple is a learner, an apprentice, a student.

We see in Jesus' own words here what is involved in making disciples. First, it involves baptizing in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Baptism symbolizes our initiation into the Kingdom of God. Baptism is about conversion. You can't be a disciple unless you've trusted Christ as your Savior and Lord, and as Paul says in Colossians, been *"rescued from the dominion of darkness and brought into the kingdom of the Son he loves, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins."*

But it doesn't just end there. Jesus says making disciples also means teaching them to *"obey everything I have commanded you."* A disciple is someone who's learning to believe and obey the words of Jesus. A disciple isn't someone who does all that Christ commands, because we're all a work in progress, but a disciple is someone who's surrendered control of his life and said, "Whatever Jesus says, I will do."

But notice **who** we're to make disciples of: all the nations. Here's where we confront a Trending Now topic, at least in the Church. The controversy revolves around the meaning of "all the nations." There are some who say "all the nations" (*panta ta ethne*) simply refers to the world beyond the Jewish world, the Gentiles. So Jesus is just saying the whole world is your mission field; invite all peoples of all cultures and all geographical areas to become my disciples. And that's true, we should do that. There are a lot of other verses we could turn to to make that point. But others point out that "all the nations" isn't referring to just all Gentiles, but rather specific groups with a unifying ethnic identity consisting of language, religion and culture called people groups.

This may sound like a minor and meaningless distinction, but here's what it boils down to: Here in Matthew 28, is Jesus sending us out specifically to reach all people groups, or just as many people as possible? I can't go into detail on this, but there's some very strong evidence Jesus was referring to people groups. John Piper has done a very thorough study on this in his book, *Let The Nations Be Glad*, and he concludes that the words "all the nations" almost always refers to people groups.

So the task of the church isn't only to gather more people but to reach more people groups; to gather the ransomed from all peoples and tribes and tongues and nations. I want to take a moment right now and show you a video that describes this task quite well (*show video*).

What's amazing is, this was God's purpose from the start. Remember the promise God made to Abraham? He said, ***"I will make you into a great nation, and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you"*** (Gen. 12:2-3). Those words, "all the peoples on earth" don't mean Gentiles or nations but "tribes" or "families." We know from the NT that ultimately this promise will be fulfilled through Abraham's seed, Jesus Christ. Through faith in him all the tribes, families, people groups of the earth will be blessed.

This was also the prayer of the psalmist: ***"May his name endure forever; may it continue as long as the sun. Then all nations will be blessed through him, and they will call him blessed"*** (Psalm 72:17). Again, the language points towards not just all people being blessed by God, but all people groups.

We even see this in the vision given to John in the book of Revelation. He's given a glimpse of the climax of history as redeemed people worship at the throne of God. He says, ***"And they sang a new song, saying: 'You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals, because you were slain, and with your blood you purchased for God persons from every tribe and language and people and nation'"*** (Rev. 5:9).

Finally, this focus on UPG's is consistent with how Paul defined his own mission. Listen to what he wrote in Romans 15, ***"So from Jerusalem all the way around to Illyricum, I have fully proclaimed the gospel of Christ. It has always been my ambition to preach the gospel where Christ was not known, so that I would not be building on someone else's foundation. Rather, as it is written: 'Those who were not told about him will see, and those who have not heard will understand.'"*** Notice Paul says he's "fully proclaimed" the gospel from Jerusalem to Illyricum. Does that mean every person there had become a Christian? No! But his purpose was defined not just by winning more people to Christ, but by reaching the unreached people groups of the world.

And God is doing this today! I heard about a group called RUN Ministries working secretly in refugee camps with a group called the Yazidi's. The Yazidi's were unreached until the ISIS invasion when they came to the camps. But now over 900 house churches have been planted among them. One of RUN's camp leaders told about a father who brought his wife and children into camp and said, with tears in his eyes: "I am Habib, and before I came to this refugee camp, I was living in the darkness of sin. Perhaps ISIS' killing of many of my friends was a punishment. I don't know the answer to that, but I do know this: Jesus has saved me, my wife and my children, from the devil. He chose us and gave us faith in Him, and it has been such a gift to us. I only wish that I knew Jesus for my entire life. However, now for the next 70 generations, I will pass on the good news and tell of His mercy and kindness!"

One of the amazing things is how God is bringing many UPG's to us here in the United States. Paul Borthwick was invited to speak at a church known for its hospitality to international students and its vision to adopt UPG's. They were particularly focused on the Miao people from southern China. When he visited the church there were posters all over inviting people to "Pray for the Miao" with statistics and information about them. As he was standing outside the banquet hall, a young man approached him and asked, "Excuse me, sir, are you from this church?"

"No, I'm not," he said. "This is my first time here."

"Me too," he replied. "This is my first time in any church. I'm from the People's Republic of China. I heard there was food, so I came."

Paul welcomed him, and then the guy said, "I need to ask another question. What is this sign — 'Pray for the Miao.'"

Paul tried his best to explain: "Well, these people here are followers of Jesus and they're trying to help other people know about him. So they're praying for this ethnic minority group from south China."

"That's amazing!" he said.

"What's amazing?" Paul replied, a little confused.

"I am Miao!" he said earnestly. "These are my people."

Paul said, "Well, this church has been praying for you." He introduced him to church leaders as the young man they'd been praying for.

Isn't that great! I'm happy to say that at CPC we have some great missions partners who are doing some great work in fulfilling the Great Commission. But we've also decided to adopt three UPG's:

- The Tibetan Jone (Choni) in Chin
- The Samanathan in India
- The Moors (Hassaniya) in Niger

You can find out more about each of these groups on our website or at joshuaproject.net. Imagine if God were to somehow use CPC to reach these UPG's. What an amazing adventure it is to be a part of God's purpose on earth—those who know telling those who don't.

So what do we do about all this? I want to end with three very practical applications: give, serve and pray.

Give

Rich Stearns, president of World Vision, says the American church is the wealthiest group of Christians in history with a total income of over \$5 trillion. The average Christian gives only 2.58 percent of their income to the church and missions. And only 2 percent of that amount ever leaves this country. Stearns calls this the "2 percent of the 2 percent." He says if Christians would be more generous and give say 10% of their income, there'd be an extra \$168 billion to spend on funding the work of Christ worldwide. With that money, we could eliminate extreme poverty for more than a billion people, educate all the children of the world, bring clean water to most of the world's poor, and offer basic health and nutrition to every person in the world. If the church did that, do you think people would want to hear about Jesus?

There's no greater way to test our commitment to Christ than by looking at where we spend our money. As Christians, we might not all be able to go into all the world, but we can give to the work of Christ in all the world.

Serve

There are so many different ways to be involved in making disciples. Our mission partner Steve Woods recently shared with me how he brought a bunch of students from the People's Republic of China to Woodleaf, a Young Life camp here in Northern California. Most of the kids had never even heard of Jesus. Fifteen of them came to Christ. But here's the point: He told me 230 people, some from this church, helped pull this whole thing off. One guy I know did all the cooking for one of their events. The point is you don't have to be on the front lines, preaching the gospel. You can be open to opportunities just to serve. God can use **anybody** because we serve in the name of the One who said he has authority over everyone and everything in the universe, and he is with us. For most of us this is a call to serve right where we live our lives. You don't have to go anywhere. You just have to open your eyes to the opportunities God has placed before you.

Pray

The most strategic thing we can do to reach these people groups is pray! Samuel M. Zwemer, a missionary, said: "The history of missions is the history of answered prayer...it is the key to the whole missionary problem. All human means are secondary."

The incredible thing about God's mission in the world is he wants to use **you**. He wants those who know to tell those who don't.

This manuscript represents the bulk of what was preached at CPC. For further detail, please refer to the audio recording of this sermon.

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