

January 22nd, 2017

—The Church—

# THE MISSION OF THE CHURCH

Matthew 28:16-21; Acts 1:6-9

Last week we began a short series called The Church, and our first message was on the meaning of the church. The most exciting thing in that first message for me was that God created the world, so that the Son of God might have a spouse—which is the church. The universe came into existence so that the church would come into existence. The church is not *merely* one institution among many, it is the supreme institution both now and for all time. “The Lord loves the gates of Zion more than all the dwelling places of Jacob.” (Psalm 87:2) Why? Because the church is the bride of Christ. That’s why God created the world—so that His Son might have a spouse. That is the ultimate meaning of the church.

## **What is mission?**

This morning we are looking at the mission of the church. What is the *mission* of the church? What is it that we are *sent* into the world to do? The question is not—what are we *commanded* to do? God commands us to do many things. “Be kind to one another...forgiving one another” (Eph. 4:32); “Abstain from sexual immorality” (1 Thess. 4:3); “Pray without ceasing” (1 Thess. 5:17). God commands us to do many things, and we ought to seek, by the power of the Holy Spirit, to obey God’s commands. But the *mission* of the church is not equivalent to all the commands of God. This has bred much confusion in our day. Many have taken commands in Scripture and turned them into *the mission* of the church. Therefore creation care has become the mission. Social justice has become the mission. Renewing the community has become the mission. Transforming politics has become the mission. There seems to be as

many different missions as there are local churches. But, as Stephen Neill has said, “If everything is mission, nothing is mission.”<sup>1</sup>

So what is mission? We get the idea of mission from the word ἀποστέλλω *apostellō*. *Apostellō* means “to send out...on a mission.”<sup>2</sup> You can hear *apostellō* used this way in **Matthew 10:16** “Behold, I am sending (*apostellō*) you out as sheep in the midst of wolves.” Therefore we see that the idea of mission implies four critical things. **1) A sender**—“Behold *I* am sending” **2) The one sent**—“I am sending *you* out as sheep” **3) The persons to whom the one is sent**—“in the midst of *wolves*.” **4) The task that is given**—why did Christ send them?

With that in mind, we must see that our mission is not everything that God commands of us. Rather our mission is what God sends us into the world to do.<sup>3</sup>

### What is the mission of the church?

So what does God send us into the world to do? What is our mission? Jesus lays it out in the great commission: “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.” (**Matthew 28:19-20**) That is the church’s mission. That is not all the church is *commanded* to do. But that is what we are *sent* into the world to do. To be witnesses to our Savior Jesus Christ, by preaching His gospel, and making disciples from every tribe and tongue and nation. This is the church’s *unique* mission. Different institutions have different missions—Dr.’s Without Borders provides medicare where it is needed most; the Red Cross collects and

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<sup>1</sup> Kevin DeYoung & Greg Gilbert, *What is the Mission of the Church?: Making Sense of Social Justice, Shalom, and the Great Commission*, (Wheaton, IL.: Crossway, 2011), pg. 37

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.blueletterbible.org/lang/lexicon/lexicon.cfm?Strongs=G649&t=KJV>

<sup>3</sup> “Likewise, John Stott has argued that mission is not everything the church does, but rather describes “everything the church is sent into the world to do.” Kevin DeYoung & Greg Gilbert, *What is the Mission of the Church?: Making Sense of Social Justice, Shalom, and the Great Commission*, (Wheaton, IL.: Crossway, 2011), pg. 20

distributes life-saving blood. But only the church is sent on mission to answer the greatest crisis that this world faces.

### **The supreme crisis of the Bible**

How can ruined sinners dwell in the presence of the Living and Holy God? That is the supreme crisis in the universe. Human beings have souls that will never die. You and I will be alive ten billion years from now. That is only good news if that crisis has been solved in your life. If that crisis is not solved, Jesus said it would be better that you were never born.<sup>4</sup> How will you a ruined sinner dwell in the presence of the Living and Holy God? That's *the* question on every page of the Bible. Tornados, and tsunamis, and HIV, and ISIS, and who is the next President, and immigration, how you will pay your bills, are not the Bible's chief concern. Although the Bible speaks to all of those things. The supreme crisis of the Bible deals with how a sinful rebellious people and the One Holy God can be reconciled.

That only answer to that question is Jesus Christ. It will not be your wealth that will comfort you on the day of wrath. It will not be how well liked you were, or how fulfilling your job was, or the quality of your marriage. In the hour of your death, the only thing that will comfort your soul is to know the Savior. As the Heidelberg Catechism puts it:

Q. What is your only comfort in life and in death?

A. That I am not my own, but belong— body and soul, in life and in death— to my faithful Savior, Jesus Christ. He has fully paid for all my sins with his precious blood, and has set me free from the tyranny of the devil...

The church is sent on mission to preach that message. That is our mission. To give witness to Jesus Christ in this lost and dying world and to make disciples.

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<sup>4</sup> Matthew 26:24

We are commanded to do other things. But if we adopt a different mission, we lose the one thing that makes our mission distinctly Christian.

### *The Big Idea...*

The mission of the church is to make disciples of all nations by proclaiming the gospel of Jesus Christ all for the glory of God

- ☆ The “What” of the Church’s Mission
- ☆ The “Why” of the Church’s Mission

## I. The “What” of the Church’s Mission

There is a liberalizing tendency in much of modern day missional theology. I want to give you two of the most popular views of mission that offer an alternative to the great commission.

### 1) “The Genesis 12 Mission”

One author looks at God’s call to Abraham in Genesis 12-13, when God tells Abraham “in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed” and concludes that because we are children of Abraham, our mission is to bless everyone.<sup>5</sup> In fact Christopher Wright, a modern missiologist says “It would be entirely appropriate, and no bad thing, if we took this text as ‘the Great Commission’: ‘Go...and be a blessing.’”<sup>6</sup> How do we answer this? **First**, who is going to be

<sup>5</sup> Reggie McNeal quoted in Kevin DeYoung & Greg Gilbert’s, *What is the Mission of the Church?: Making Sense of Social Justice, Shalom, and the Great Commission*, (Wheaton, IL.,: Crossway, 2011), pg. 30

<sup>6</sup> Kevin DeYoung & Greg Gilbert, *What is the Mission of the Church?: Making Sense of Social Justice, Shalom, and the Great Commission*, (Wheaton, IL.,: Crossway, 2011), pg. 31

against blessing others?<sup>7</sup> But is simply blessing the world, our main mission? **Secondly**, Genesis 12:3 is not in the imperative mood. Meaning when God tells Abraham that he will be blessed, God is not commanding something, but rather declaring something. But **thirdly**, and most important, the blessing only comes by putting one's faith in Jesus Christ. That's Paul interpretation in **Galatians 3:9** "So then, those who are *of faith are blessed along with Abraham*, the man of faith." Therefore, if Genesis 12 is a mission statement, the priority is not on blessing everybody but on calling all peoples to put their faith in Jesus Christ so that they would be blessed.

## 2) "The Luke 4 Mission"

Luke 4:18-19 is the passage when Jesus began His public ministry. He stood up in the synagogue and read from Isaiah

"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor."

A popular interpretation of this text, is that our mission (in order to keep in step with Christ's mission) is "to extend the kingdom by infiltrating all segments of society, with preference given to the poor, and allowing no dichotomy between evangelism and social transformation."<sup>8</sup> In other words, social justice and care for the poor *ought* to be the mission of the church. How do we answer? **First**, by paying close attention to Jesus' actual words. Three times, Jesus says his *main* mission was to preach the gospel. Jesus says, I have been anointed "...to **proclaim** good news...to **proclaim** liberty...to **proclaim** the year of the Lord's favor." The idea that evangelism and social justice are *equally* side by side in this

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<sup>7</sup> Even Jesus said "bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you."

<sup>8</sup> James F. Engel and Willaim A. Dyrness quoted in Kevin DeYoung & Greg Gilbert's, *What is the Mission of the Church?: Making Sense of Social Justice, Shalom, and the Great Commission*, (Wheaton, IL.,: Crossway, 2011), pg. 37

text simply isn't here. **Second**, we can't understand the word "poor" to exclusively mean materially impoverished. Just a few verses later (v.25-27) Jesus gives two examples of people who received the Lord's favor in the O.T. The first was the widow of Zarephath who was materially poor. The second was Naaman, the Syrian general who was materially rich. What Jesus has in mind *mainly* in this passage is those who are poor in spirit (Matthew 5:3), that is those who see their complete spiritual bankruptcy outside of Jesus Christ.<sup>9</sup> **Thirdly**, it was claimed that whatever Jesus' mission is, is also our mission.<sup>10</sup> Dear congregation, where does the Bible say that our mission is the same as Jesus'? Should we also die for people's sins? This type of understanding is very damaging not only to interpreting the Bible, but also to our real mission.

Therefore Luke 4 *is* a mission statement. It was Jesus' mission statement —not one of societal transformation, but of preaching the gospel to the poor in spirit that they might be set free.

### Why is the Great Commission *the* mission of the Church?

What is it about the great commission that puts itself forward as the supreme mission *of the church*? **First**, consider that the Father sending the Son into the world is the greatest mission of all time. **1 John 4:14** "And we have seen and testify that the Father has *sent* his Son to be the Savior of the world." Jesus Christ is the answer to the question: how can ruined sinners dwell in the presence of the Living and Holy God? Is there anything more terrifying than to be guilty of sin and to have the righteous God as your judge? What can be more dreadful than to have God as your enemy for all eternity?

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<sup>9</sup> One author says "This means the poor are sinners like everybody else, because ultimately sinfulness is rooted in the human heart. Just as the materially rich can be spiritually poor, the materially poor can be spiritually poor." David J. Bosch quoted in Kevin DeYoung & Greg Gilbert's, *What is the Mission of the Church?: Making Sense of Social Justice, Shalom, and the Great Commission*, (Wheaton, IL.,: Crossway, 2011), pg. 40

<sup>10</sup> As one modern author has said "everything a Christian and a Christian church is, says and does should be missional in its conscious participation in the mission of God in God's world." Christopher J. H. Wright quoted in Kevin DeYoung & Greg Gilbert's, *What is the Mission of the Church?: Making Sense of Social Justice, Shalom, and the Great Commission*, (Wheaton, IL.,: Crossway, 2011), pg. 42

But Jesus Christ answers that problem. On the cross, the Son of God became God's enemy so you could be God's Son. He is willing to remove the stain of sin that alienates you from God (1 **John 1:7**). He is willing to deliver you from the wrath that is certainly coming (1 **Thess. 1:10**). He is willing to give you His Holy Spirit, and birth in you love, and joy, and peace. He is willing to fulfill all the desires of your heart. That's who Jesus Christ is. He calls out to poor and miserable sinners. "Come, all you who are thirsty, come to the waters; ...Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow;" (**Isaiah 55:1; 1:18**) Jesus Christ is the answer to the biggest crisis of your existence. He alone will qualify to stand before the Living and Holy God—if you trust Him, and cling to Him, and rely upon Him.

That's the first reason why the great commission is *the mission* of the church. Because in proclaiming Jesus Christ to the world, we are placing before them the only One who can save them from their sin.

### **The Great Commission is the Climax of the Gospels**

The second reason why we know that the great commission *is the mission of the church* is found in the passage itself. The entire gospel of Matthew climaxes in these final words of Jesus. As Jesus' mission on earth ends, the church's mission begins.

v. 18 "And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me."

Jesus tells us that He is sending us because He has possesses all the authority in heaven and on earth. As Calvin says "No ordinary authority would here have been enough...without such a support it would [be] impossible for [the church] to make any progress"<sup>11</sup> The gospel is the savor of life to those who are being saved and the stench of death for those who are perishing. Satan and the world

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<sup>11</sup> John Calvin, *Calvin's Commentaries, Vol. XVII*, (Grand Rapids, MI.: BakerBooks, 2009), pg. 381-382

will resist this message with all the powers of hell. So He sends us out with an authority that can not be conquered.

v.19-20 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.”

There are four verbs here. “Make disciples” is the main verb. The church is to *make disciples* of all nations. This should have been shocking to the initial disciples because Jesus levels the playing field making the Gentile equal to the Jew. Jesus is not merely the Jewish God, He is God over Russia, over Canada, over Brazil. He has people in every tribe and tongue and nation that He died for.

The three remaining verbs fill out what making disciples looks like. First, we are to “**go.**” Meaning, Jesus is sending us out. **Romans 10:14-15** “And how are they to hear without someone preaching? And how are they to preach unless they are sent?” Second we are to “**baptize.**” The focus here is not only on the sign of the covenant, but that the gospel has brought repentance and forgiveness of sins. Third we are to “**teach.**” Jesus is not aiming at mere conversion experience. As one author says “He wants obedient, mature disciples, not just immediate decisions.”<sup>12</sup>

This is the main mission of the church, it contains all the elements of mission. A sender—Jesus Christ; the ones who are sent—the church; the ones we are sent to—all nations; and the task—make disciples. And Jesus tells us in v.20 how long this mission remains: “to the end of the age.”

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<sup>12</sup> Kevin DeYoung & Greg Gilbert, *What is the Mission of the Church?: Making Sense of Social Justice, Shalom, and the Great Commission*, (Wheaton, IL.: Crossway, 2011), pg. 46



That is the second reason why we know that the great commission is *the mission* of the church: all four gospel accounts climax in their own version of the great commission.<sup>13</sup>

### **The Great Commission is the Commencement of Acts<sup>14</sup>**

The third reason why we know the great commission is *the mission* of the church is because it was *the mission* of the church in the book of Acts. The great commission is repeated by Jesus in **Acts 1:8** “But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.” And what do we see throughout every chapter? That mission being carried out. In Acts 2, Peter bears witness to the saving power of Jesus Christ at Pentecost and thousands were added to the church. In Acts 3, Peter and John heal the lame man. Thousands flock to see what is happening. They bear witness to Jesus Christ and five thousand people repent and believe. In Acts 4, these same men are arrested and then preach Jesus Christ to the council at their defense. When they are released, they ask God “to continue to speak [His] word with all boldness.” In Acts 5, after another trip to jail, God miraculously sets them free with the command in v.20 “Go and stand in the temple and speak to the people all the words of this Life.” In Acts 6, deacons are appointed so that the Apostles can continue to be devoted to the ministry of the Word and prayer. And on and on and on.

And that is how the book of Acts ends: the Apostle Paul “...proclaiming the kingdom of God and teaching about the Lord Jesus Christ with all boldness.” (Acts 28:31). But it wasn’t merely evangelism that was happening in the book of Acts. Churches were planted, disciples were strengthened, doctrines were settled, fellowships were established, the apostle’s teaching became the food of the church. But what you don’t see in the book of Acts, is the apostles

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<sup>13</sup> cf. Mark 13:10; 14:9; Luke 24:44-49; John 20:21

<sup>14</sup> Tremendous help came in this section by Kevin DeYoung & Greg Gilbert, *What is the Mission of the Church?: Making Sense of Social Justice, Shalom, and the Great Commission*, (Wheaton, IL.,: Crossway, 2011), pg. 50-51

seeking to alter the essential meaning of the church's mission. As Kevin DeYoung says

“If you are looking for a picture of the early church giving itself to creation care, plans for society renewal, and strategies to serve the community in Jesus' name, you won't find them in Acts. But if you are looking for preaching, teaching, and the centrality of the Word, this is your book. The story of Acts is the story of the earliest Christian's efforts to carry out the commission given them in Acts 1:8.”<sup>15</sup>

That is the third reason why we know the great commission is *the mission* of the church, it frames every single activity of the early church in the book of Acts. Therefore that is the “what” of the church's mission. Now let's look to the “why.”

## II. The “Why” of the Church's Mission

### **What is the motive of our mission?**

Why should we carry on the mission of the church? There are a couple compelling answers to this question that are true but not *ultimate* answers. The first answer is that we should go out because that is what God commands us to do. God speaks and we ought to obey. True. But to what end? If we desire to fulfill the mission of the church with the fuel of naked obedience, we will soon burn out. The second answer is that we should go out because sinners are going to go to hell. And the thought of people suffering eternally under the wrath of God is horrifying. Also true. But what happens, when you have an Adoniram Judson experience? The great missionary to Burma didn't see a single convert for 6 years, and no major breakthrough for 19. What happens when people aren't flocking to the church asking “What must I do to be saved?” What happens to the mission then? When nobody seems to be interested in Christ?

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<sup>15</sup> Kevin DeYoung & Greg Gilbert, *What is the Mission of the Church?: Making Sense of Social Justice, Shalom, and the Great Commission*, (Wheaton, IL.: Crossway, 2011), pg. 49

Where will you find the motive to continue? Here's how John Stott answers that question.

“The highest of missionary **motives** is neither obedience to the Great Commission (important as that is), nor love for sinners who are alienated and perishing (strong as that incentive is, especially when we contemplate the wrath of God...), but rather zeal—burning and passionate zeal—for the glory of Jesus Christ...Only one imperialism is Christian...and that is concern for His Imperial Majesty Jesus Christ, and for the glory of his empire.”<sup>16</sup>

Dear congregation, this was Christ's highest motive. That the glory of His empire would be known.

It was for this glory that He endured the shame of the cross. **John 12:27-28**  
 “Now is my soul troubled. And what shall I say? ‘Father, save me from this hour’? *But for this purpose I have come to this hour. Father, glorify your name.*”

It was this glory that Jesus prayed His disciples would see. **John 17:24**  
 “Father, I desire that they also, whom you have given me, may be with me where I am, to see my glory. ”

It is for the glory of this empire that the church is to be on mission. **1 Peter 2:9**  
 “But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, *that you may proclaim the excellencies of him* who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.”

That is the “why” of the church's mission: that God would be known, and admired, and adored, and enjoyed, and treasured, and worshipped in all nations. That is the goal of the church's mission: worship. The church is to make disciples so that the glory of His empire can cover the earth as the waters cover

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<sup>16</sup> John Stott, quoted in John Piper's *Let the Nations Be Glad!: The Supremacy of God in Missions*, (Grand Rapids, MI.: Baker Academic, 2003), pg. 9

the seas. That is why mission exists. It serves a higher end. The mission of the church is not an end in itself. Worship is the ultimate end. When Christ returns to judge all the earth, the mission will end. But worship will last forever.

## Application

This morning is sanctity of life Sunday. The modern holocaust of abortions both in this country and around the world make what Hitler in terms of sheer numbers look insignificant. Woe to you America. Your time of reckoning is coming. This land has been profaned the blood of the innocent.

There is a deep connection between the this morning's message and abortions. William Wilberforce saw it in his day when he fought against slavery. He said that the reason why England had slaves was because they didn't believe in justification by faith alone. That is a huge theological jump, but let me help you see it. When Jesus told the parable of the Pharisee and the Tax Collector in Luke 18, Luke says in v.9 "[Jesus] told this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, *and treated others with contempt.*" Those who think they are righteous in themselves (when is to deny justification by faith alone) will treat other people with contempt. The Pharisee thought he was a good person. "God, *I* thank you that *I* am not like other men, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. *I* fast twice a week; *I* give tithes of all that *I* get." (Luke 18:11-12). Because of his self-righteousness, he despised the tax collector.

Our Doctrine: Abortions exist because America does not believe the gospel

America despises the unborn in the womb and legalizes infanticide because America is self-righteous. America doesn't believe that she needs the

righteousness of Christ to stand before a holy God. America is proud. She is not humble. She is choking on her own self-sufficiency and self-reliance, and that is the reason that abortions exists *mainly*.

This is the stumbling block to the gospel—that mankind is inconceivably wicked, and unless one is covered in the righteousness of Christ, they cannot be saved. This is only received by faith alone. By utter dependence upon the Savior. A proud spirit will not do this. Only an impoverished spirit will cry out with the tax collector ‘God, be merciful to me, a sinner!’ (**Luke 18:13**)

And that is the mission of the church! To preach that message! That it is “...not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy,” that Christ has saved us. (**Titus 3:5**) Preaching Christ crucified for sinners, and having sinners transformed by the power of the gospel is the only thing that will ultimate severe the root of abortion.

But that doesn’t mean there is nothing else we can do. In Galatians, when Paul was sent by James and Peter and John to go to the Gentiles to preach the gospel there, they asked him to remember the poor. He says in **Galatians 2:10** “Only, they asked us to remember the poor, the very thing I was eager to do.” Paul saw no contradiction between saying that the gospel was his main mission —“For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified” (**1 Cor. 2:2**); he saw no contradiction between that being *the mission* and helping those who are suffering. Our desire here at this local church is also to be able to do both. We want to recognize that the mission of the church is unequivocally to make disciples of Jesus Christ and that to teach those disciples to observe all that Christ has commanded.

This morning we want to observe Christ’s command to remember the poor, and help the fatherless in their affliction and so we are going to take up a special offering for the local crisis pregnancy center.

Our Duty: Consider the two extremes in speaking about the church’s mission

There are two extremes that we can fly off to when we speak about the church's mission. On the one hand there is the **indifferent** Christian. The indifferent Christian can hear a message like this and think therefore that *evangelism* is the only thing that counts; that mercy ministry is a failure if it doesn't result in conversion. And so the indifferent Christian sees the man on the Jericho road suffering and passes by on the other side because he doesn't reckon the great commission can be fulfilled. The indifferent Christian further forgets the cultural mandate and will see his job as meaningless because it's not a church service, and therefore does not pursue excellence in his field. The indifferent Christian will stop strategizing on how to creatively love their neighbor as themselves, and how to make a meaningful impact on their communities. The indifferent Christian runs the risk of having a dead faith.

On the other hand there is the **inoffensive** Christian. The inoffensive Christian can seize on the commands to do good works, and make that of first importance in the church's mission. The inoffensive Christian will say things like "the world needs more clean water not more sermons." The inoffensive Christian will be plagued with false guilt thinking that the church is responsible with fixing all the world's problems, and therefore the making of disciples is lost in all of it's Martha like activities. The inoffensive Christian runs the risk of giving the world everything that they need to be comfortable on their way to hell.

Those are the two extremes: indifference towards the world, and a desire to be unoffensive to the world. Where do you tend to land? Both of them fail in the great commission. The indifferent Christian fails to observe all the other commandments. The inoffensive Christian fails to see the making of disciples as *the mission* of the church.

Our Delight: "Behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age."

The church is the only institution on planet earth that is charged with making disciples. If the church fails to do this, who will accomplish it? But here's the problem, Jesus has charged us with a mission that is impossible for us

to fulfill. If left to our own strength, we will either abandon our mission, or we will not have enough wisdom or strength to fulfill it. The greatest war on planet earth is not against terrorism, but it is against the great commission. Jesus knows this, which is why He attaches this promise to the end of the great commission: “And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.” What is Jesus saying? He’s saying ‘Church I know that you are weak, but I am strong. I know that you are insufficient, but I am all-sufficient. I know that you will lack wisdom in how to do this, but I will be your wisdom. I know that you will feel like you are defeated, but I am your victory. I know that your task is impossible, but with Me all things are possible.’ That is Christ’s very pledge to His church. He has promised to be “Immanuel”—God with us in this mission until the end of time.

## Closing Prayer to Sermon

### Benediction:

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all. (2 Cor. 13:14)

