

The Bronze Sea.¹ (slide.1)

As Mark has been sharing throughout this series, we're using this time before Easter to look at the theme of Christ's kingship as found in in the Gospel of Matthew. Not just in His birth/death/resurrection/ascension, but also in what Mark has been calling, "the bit in the middle"—the years of Christ's public ministry.² After all, Jesus came to earth, not just to die, but also to live; He came in order to fulfill Israel's calling and the preeminent Israelite through whom God's redeeming purposes broke into the world. Today, I'm dovetailing off of the verses Mark spoke of last week concerning our call to mission. In particular, I want to look at our Lord's words to His disciples surrounding the resistance that they would face, but also the strength and grace they would enjoy through the gospel and through the deep love of God, and how this applies to our own lives, as Christ's disciples, even now. Alex already read our text, so let's begin by looking to our Lord in prayer (slide/black.2).

In the courtyard (slide.3) of the ancient temple in Jerusalem stood a massive basin made of bronze that held roughly 15,000 gallons of water. This basin sat on (slide.4) the backs of twelve bronze bull statues. The statues were divided into four sets of three bulls—each set facing (slide.5) different direction of the compass (2 Chron 4:2-5). The number "four" is a pretty big deal in the pages of Scripture. Jeremiah speaks of the four quarters of heaven. Isaiah speak of the four corners of the earth. Revelation speaks of four angels holding back the four winds of the land. The word is used similarly by Ezekiel, Daniel, Zechariah, and others.³ The idea communicated here is one of "geographical completeness" and, therefore, as a designation for the whole earth.⁴

Theologians have drawn connection between this structure in the temple and the (slide.6) four rivers that came out from the Garden of Eden. Desmond Alexander and Greg Beal have spoken of these rivers (as well as the bronze basin in the temple courtyard) as a symbol of humanity's call to extend the message of God's kingdom purposes to all the earth.⁵ It's probably no accident that that the (slide.7) New Jerusalem described in Revelation 21 speaks of twelve jeweled gates in sets of three facing the four points of the compass. These are more than architectural flourishes. These are vivid reminders of the call to mission extended to the people of God (slide/black.8). When God called Abraham, he was told that he and his descendants were to be a "blessing" to the nations. When God called the people of Israel out of Egypt, He restated that same idea. Even at the dedication of the temple, Solomon spoke of the temple as that which was to facilitate the

prayers of both Israelites and Gentiles.⁶ But as we continue to read the Bible, we come to realize that that's not what happened. Instead of being a light to the Gentiles, the Jewish nation used their relationship to God as a mark of superiority and as an excuse to disdain those who are foreign. What was meant to be a bridge instead became a wall.⁷

So here's Jesus, some 1,000 years after Solomon prayed that prayer. And in the eighth chapter of John's Gospel, He declares Himself to be, not just an enlightened teacher, but (slide.9) "the light of the world." The One who would proclaim the glories of God's salvation and the good news of God's kingdom to the nations. And I get that. Jesus is no ordinary teacher. He's Jesus; it makes sense that He would be the light of the world. But then He does something unexpected. In His Sermon on the Mount, He turns to His followers and says that (slide.10) they too (and through them, all who follow Christ) are "the light of the world."

And you read that, and you wonder if maybe Jesus could have found someone a little more qualified. And you wonder what the disciples thought as they heard those words. But here we are some five chapters later, and makes good on what He said as He calls them to the work of mission.

The Call to Mission.

We read at the (slide.11) start of our chapter that Jesus calls His "disciples" and sends them out on mission. That word is one of Matthew's favorites; he uses it nearly eighty times in his Gospel. Some of Jesus' instructions seem odd to our ears. For this first mission, He has them to (slide.12) avoid the Gentiles and Samaritans and to stick instead to what He calls (slide.13) "the lost sheep of Israel" with the message of the kingdom. Jesus also tells them to (slide.14) leave wallets and suitcases at home, but to instead go out with just the clothes on their backs. There's also this thing about (slide.15) shaking the dust off your feet when you leave a home or a town that is less than hospitable to you. As we (slide/black.16) read the rest of the NT (especially the book of Acts), it's clear that these specific instructions were not standard operating procedure for each and every situation (most of all stuff about avoiding Gentiles and Samaritans). In fact, one of the most notable marks of the work of mission in the NT church was its diversity of expression.

Paul's approach was different from Peter's. Peter's approach was different from Phillip's. Phillip's approach was different from the approach taken by Barnabas, or Apollos, or Pricilla and Aquilla. It was never not a one-size-fits-all; instead, we see a lot of variety.

But the one that's clear is the early church's desire to make its faith known—both through words but also (as Mark spoke of last week) through actions. You might be thinking, "I'm not sure I'm especially qualified." *But honestly, your biography is your qualification.* Your gifts, your age, your gender, your ethnicity. Your successes, but also your failures. It's what God has done through you by His grace. Honestly, there are some needs that only you can meet. There are some hands that only you can hold.⁸ Your faith in Christ cannot be Tampa's best-kept secret. It is not an accident that a (slide.17) depiction of the bronze basin is there on the outside wall of this building.

There are two things that are absolutely clear from the pages of Scripture. First off, the early church understood that they were a people who had been called to both proclaim and demonstrate message of the gospel (slide/black.18). Number two, the early church understood that this call would not be without its difficulties.

The Reality of Mistreatment.

Jesus declares (slide.19), "*Behold, I am sending you out as sheep in the midst of wolves, so be wise as serpents and innocent as doves.*" Jesus is telling His disciples to work openly, but He's also telling them to work cautiously. That word (slide.20) used here to describe serpents is pretty broad. It can mean to be "cunning" or "shrewd," "cautious" or "sensible." It points to the need for careful thought when confronted with difficult situations.⁹ But at the same time, Christ is calling His followers to be "innocent" as doves. That word literally means (slide.21) "unmixed," "pure," and "transparent." It's not a call to be naïve, but it is a call to an irreproachable honesty.¹⁰ We're called to use both our heads and our hearts.

Jesus promises His disciples (slide.22) that there will be times of persecution (slide.23): *religious* persecution from the leaders in the synagogues, (slide.24) *political* persecution from governors and kings, and even (slide.25) persecution from one's own *family*. In the previous section, the very worst rejection Jesus predicted was maybe a lack of hospitality that you would respond by knocking dust off your feet. But in this section, the bar is raised. Jesus speaks of His followers being delivered over to courts, and being flogged, and hated, and even being put to death. In the year 325 AD, in the month of May (slide/black.26), 200 bishops, monks, and theologians of the church traveled to the city of Nicaea (in what is now modern Turkey). The purpose of the gathering was to deal with some matters of heresy, but they were also there to compose a creed that would summarize the core beliefs revealed in Scripture. Today during our service James led us in the reading of the creed that came from that council. The Council of Nicaea took place

shortly after a horrible time of persecution. Historians speak of these churchmen as kind of a motley crew. Many came with severed limbs, and marred faces, and gouged eyes from the torment they had endured for the faith.¹¹

We look at the (slide.27) words of Jesus here in Matthew 10, and it's hard to know exactly what to do with them, especially here in the West. Few (in any of us) in the West will be subject to this kind of persecution. Yet this kind of persecution occurs in our world even now every single day. And for that reason alone, at bare minimum, we should make it our practice to pray regularly for the church worldwide. And yet, it would be naïve for us to think that were fully immune, even here in the West. We may not suffer martyrdom, but there will be times when we will be mistreated, or at least misunderstood (slide/black.28).

We have to remember who we are and to Whom we belong. And that's especially difficult because, as well as a relationship may be going, there will come a point where you're in a conversation with a friend or a coworker, and you're asked to do something or go someplace, or you're asked a question about the faith. And you know in your gut that there is a very good chance that your answer (if you're honest) will not be well received. And might be tempting to compromise and shortchange the gospel and turn it into something that's maybe a little easier. **And yes, we're to walk in wisdom and to not be obnoxious/prideful/crude. We're called to show empathy and demonstrate love. But at the same time, we cannot deny who we are in Christ.** And that is the rub. Sometimes the hardest thing to do is to show fidelity and faithfulness regarding God and His word. And doing that may cause us to be mistreated or misunderstood, or set us back in that friendship or set us back in back in our careers, but we are called to remember who we are and to remember to Whom we belong.

Fear Not.

So what does Christ say? We see it here (slide.29) in our text. In fact, we see it three times. Jesus tells His disciples (slide.30) to not be afraid, to fear not. This isn't the only place we read these words. No (slide.31), dozens and dozens of times, in both the OT and the NT, the people of God are exhorted to "fear not." Of course, the funny thing about fear is that it's not the same for all of us. Your fears are not the same as mine. My fears are not the same as yours. That may be one reason why we're called to community. I can say an encouraging word to you; you can say an encouraging word to me (slide/black.32).

So here's Jesus. He not only gives His disciples a threefold command; He also gives them a threefold antidote for fear. So let's look at these three. We'll go through these first two quickly and spend a little more time on the third. Number one (slide.33), we're given **the perspective of eternity**. Nothing is covered that will not be revealed, or hidden that will not be made known. The end of the chapter is not the end of the book. Fear loses its power when we realize how the story ends. What is currently whispered in the dark will eventually be shouted in the daylight. God's goodness and faithfulness; His sovereignty and justice. Jesus is more than a nice idea for people who want a little religion in their lives. No, the Apostle Paul writes that there will come a day when (slide.34):

At the name of Jesus every knee will bow, of those who are in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father (Phil 2:10-11).

This is a future hope that is to encourage our present reality. And to see this, to understand this shapes our perspective and changes our outlook.

Number one (slide.35), we're given **the perspective of eternity**. Number two (slide.36), we're given **the displacement of fear**. Jesus exhorts His followers to not fear those who kill the body, but cannot kill the soul. Rather they are to fear/revere Him who can destroy both soul and body in hell. Those who persecute are able to end bodily life but they are unable (the Greek word used here literally means that (slide.37) "they lack the power") to kill the soul. Of this, Leon Morris, in his commentary on this passage, concluded that (slide.38) *"People with this significant limitation are not to be feared."*¹² To me that seems a little easier said than done, yet that was the perspective of much of the ancient church.

There's a guy I've mentioned before; his name is (slide.39) Polycarp. Polycarp was the bishop of Smyrna and (in his younger years) a disciple of the Apostle John. As an old man, he's arrested for his faith, brought into the arena, and ordered to burn incense to Caesar. He's told that if he curses Christ and worships the emperor, he'll be released. But here's Polycarp's reply; he says (slide.40): *"Eighty-six years I have served Christ and He never did me any wrong. How can I blaspheme my King who saved me?"* For that, he was tied to a stake and martyred.¹³ Polycarp understood what Luther would put into the hymn we sang today (slide.41): *"The body they may kill; God's truth abideth still. His kingdom is forever!"*

The Deep Love of God.

Number one (slide.42), Jesus gives to His followers the perspective of eternity. Number two (slide.43), He reminds them that their reference for God (His power/glory/holiness) dislocates and displaces anything anyone can do to them. Number three (slide.44), Christ reminds His disciples (and through them, he reminds us) of the deep love of God. Verse 29:

²⁹ Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? And not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father. ³⁰ But even the hairs of your head are all numbered. ³¹ Fear not, therefore; you are of more value than many sparrows.

There's an idea that's found in Hebrew literature; it's called (slide.45) *kal vechomer*. This is a compound phrase (slide.46): *kal* means "light" and *vechomer* means "heavy." The *kal vechomer* is the principle of "the light and the heavy," (slide.47) "from the lesser to the greater." In other words, "If *this*, how much more *that*?"¹⁴ Now, that is different from how we typically speak in the West. In the West, when we wish to describe something, we usually focus on an extreme. For example (slide.48), if a Westerner is talking about a party he enjoyed, he might say (slide.49), "This was the biggest, best, most amazingly-fantastic party in the known universe!" It's the language of extreme; it's the Western way of speaking. In contrast, what (slide.50) might be a Hebrew/Eastern way of saying that a party was great? The person from the East would focus on something small; he might say (slide.51), "Even the potato chips were impressive." That's the *kal vechomer*—from the light to the heavy. That's what's going on (slide.52) here in our text.

In underscoring the deep love of God for His people, Scripture often (not always, but often) focuses, not on that which is big, but on that which is small—the lilies of the field, the birds of the air, a pair of sparrows you can purchase for a penny. And in doing so, we're given the portrait of a God who is not a deistic, uninvolved deity who wound up the universe like a clockmaker so He can take a long Rip Van Winkle nap. But instead as a loving Father who is aware of and involved in even most minute details of your crisis and pain and fear. I love how Craig Barnes puts it; he writes (slide.53):

In all my years of pastoral care, I have never talked anyone out of being afraid, although I've certainly tried. No one is *argued* out of fear. We can only be *loved* out of it. And according to the Bible, that is exactly what the perfect love of God does: it casts out fear.¹⁵

Isn't this a better way to live? Isn't this a better way to go through our days?

And why does this take place? (slide/black.54) It takes place because of Christ and His love.

The Apostle Paul put it best in his letter to the Romans.

What, then, shall we say in response to these things?

If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare His own Son, but gave Him up for us all—how will He not also (along with Him), graciously give us all things?

³³ Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen?

It is God who justifies. ³⁴ Who then is the one who condemns?

No one. Christ Jesus who died (more than that, who was raised to life) is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us.

³⁸ For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, ³⁹ neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Let's pray.

¹ OT reading: Jer 31:31-33 (ESV).

² N. T. Wright, *How God Became King: The Forgotten Story of the Gospels* (New York: HarperOne, 2011), 4.

³ Isa 11:12; Ezek 37:9; Dan 7:2; 8:8; 11:4; Zech 6:5; Matt 24:31; Mark 13:27; Rev 7:1; 20:8.

⁴ T. Stordalen, *Echoes of Eden: Genesis 2-3 and Symbolism of the Eden Garden in Biblical Hebrew Literature*. Contributions to Biblical Exegesis & Theology 25. (Leuven, BE: Peeters, 2000), 275.

⁵ T. Desmond Alexander, *From Eden to the New Jerusalem: An Introduction to Biblical Theology* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Academic & Professional, 2009), 25-26; G. K. Beale, *The Temple and the Church's Mission: A Biblical Theology of the Dwelling Place of God* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2004), 10-11.

⁶ Gen 12:3; Exod 19:6; 1 Kings 8:41-43; Isa 49:6. See Beale, *The Temple and the Church's Mission*, 170; Peter J. Leithart, *Theopolitical Liturgy* (West Monroe, LA: Athanasius Press, 2019), 11; Walter Kaiser Jr., *Mission in the Old Testament: Israel as a Light to the Nations*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2012).

⁷ Dave Bisgrove, "The Church" (sermon, Redeemer Presbyterian Church, 2018).

⁸ Timothy Keller, "The World Will Hate You" (sermon, Redeemer Presbyterian Church, 2012).

⁹ Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to Matthew*, PNTC, ed. D. A. Carson (Grand Rapids/Cambridge: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1992), 252.

¹⁰ R. T. France, *Matthew: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 1, TNTC (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1985), 186.

¹¹ D. H. Williams, "Who Came to the Council of Nicaea?" *Christian History & Biography*, Issue 85 (2005): 20.

¹² Leon Morris, *The Gospel according to Matthew*, PNTC (Grand Rapids: W.B. Eerdmans, 1992), 262.

¹³ Edmund P. Clowney, *The Message of 1 Peter: The Way of the Cross*, BST (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1988), 191.

¹⁴ Craig L. Blomberg, *Matthew NAC* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1992).; Brad Young, *The Parables* (Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, 1998), 87.

¹⁵ M. Craig Barnes, *The Pastor as Minor Prophet: Texts and Subtexts in the Ministerial Life* (Grand Rapids/Cambridge: Wm. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2009), 99.