

The mandate Jesus gives - Mission 2 (13/4/08)

The great commission given at the end of Matthew's gospel is unchanging. With many mistakes and failures our lives are dedicated, individually and together, to working out in practice what it means to submit to the authority of Christ, to obey his command, and experience his presence in our whole lives.

Doing mission in Christ's way

The last command of Jesus is not to be fulfilled in any way we think best. Jesus disciples are to fulfil their mission by following in the steps of their master.

This comes to a climax in Matthew (1) Mission under the authority of Jesus; (2) Mission in the steps of Jesus; (3) Mission with the presence of Jesus.

Mission under the authority of Jesus

We need to know whose authority we act under.

Matthew is full of Old Testament citations and allusions. Matthew uses Jesus as Messiah, Son of David, Lord, Son of man, Son of God. Indeed that he is God personified.

Christian mission can never be understood apart from its authorization in the authority of Jesus; and the Jesus upon whose authority, universal mission is based is the Jesus of Matthew's careful presentation, uniquely powerful in word and deed.

Mission in the steps of Jesus.

Of all the gospels, Matthew is the most elaborate in setting forth the ethical requirements of the kingdom.

Parallels between Jesus and disciples. He itinerates in Galilee, so do they. He teaches, preaches and heals, so do they. They will suffer just as he did.

Disciples too are to fulfil their mission with Jesus-like behaviour.

In the Gospels he exemplifies love for God and neighbour and so should they; he shows law-fulfilling justice in his life; he submits to the will of God; he prays 'Not my will but thine be done,' and so should they.

And so should WE.

We who seek to obey his last command to go and make disciples, baptise and teach, need to walk the path that he walked.

It's a path we need to walk, so it's a journey. No quick blitz to convert people, but as journey beside them leading them along the path to Jesus.

Mission with the presence of Jesus.

From the first to the last Matthew is the gospel of God with us. Matthew uses the word 'Father' for God 44 times. But he also designates God as 'your Father', referring to the disciples.

Whenever two or three disciples are gathered in his name, Jesus declares that he is in their midst. Everywhere, always, till the end of the age Jesus will be present with his disciples as they seek to follow him.

Matthew's first readers and every successive generation of disciples finish their reading of his story with a worldwide mission based on Jesus' worldwide authority, to be conducted in a Jesus like manner with the promise of his worldwide a history long presence.