The Lordship of Jesus Christ

Matthew 28:16-20

Before Jesus ascended into heaven, He told the apostles what to do while He is gone. The great commission lays out the marching orders of the Christian church and the reason for it. When the church understands the lordship of Christ and lives it out on earth, we turn the world upside down. This happened in Reformation and we pray will happen again.

Summary of the Text

Matthew says Jesus gathers the eleven disciples to the mountain in Galilee where He had appointed them (v. 16). Some worship and some doubt, but He instructs them all: "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth" (vv. 17-18). Notice He doesn't say "some authority," or "spiritual authority," or "authority over hearts," or "authority over those who acknowledge Me," or anything like that. He also doesn't say "authority in heaven but people will be left to themselves on the earth." All authority in heaven and earth has been given to Him, the second Adam risen from the dead. He conquered Satan, sin, and death, rose with the keys of Hades, and therefore declares His complete Lordship—"all authority"—over heaven and earth. *Therefore*, the apostles must go and disciple all the nations. How are they going to make disciples? By baptizing them in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit and teaching them to observe all things He commanded (v. 20). We know He would soon ascend into heaven, but that's alright, "Lo", He will be with them to the end of the age (v. 20). Matthew loves it: "Amen."

Lord of Salvation

We can describe different causes of the Reformation that together to explain what happened. The formal cause was *sola Scriptura,* which answers the question, "Who has final authority, the Scriptures or the church?" What is the final court of appeal? The Bible. The material cause refers to the center of the issue. What was the primary conflict between Protestants and Catholics? It was justification by faith alone. How is a person justified—made and declared righteous—before God? By faith, or by faith and works? How you answer this question depends upon whether you ask the pope or the apostle Paul, and the reformers answered with Paul, *sola fide*: "Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith apart from the deeds of the law" (Rom. 3:28). Like all theology, this is not merely an intellectual question as Martin Luther learned during his time as an Augustinian monk. He entered the monastery after God spared him during a lightning storm on way back to school at the University of Erfert. He followed the strict rules of the order but found the more he did the more he needed to confess the shortcomings of what he did. How could he know he was contrite enough? Would a repentant person fall asleep during prayers? After many six-hour confession sessions, his superiors were bothered. In 1510 the monastery sent him on business to Rome and when he first saw the holy city he fell on his face. There he saw masses being said for the dead so quickly as to be incomprehensible, and in one church two masses said at the same time. If it's all about going through the motions, it was going well. But is that what Jesus commanded? Luther climbed the Scala Sancta on his knees, kissing each step, the steps believed to be the ones that Jesus ascended when appearing before Pontius Pilate. When he got to the top he said, "Who knows if this is true?" Luther was soon transferred to be a theology professor at Wittenberg where the castle church boasted nine aisles with over 19,000 relics including a twig from Moses' burning bush, straw from Jesus' manger, a few of Mary's hairs, a nail from the cross, and many teeth and bones of famous saints from which he could scores 100 days of indulgence each by veneration. These monstrosities caused Luther and the reformers to see the that it is faith alone, *sola fide*, that saves us. Faith is the gift of God by which we receive *sola gratia*, grace alone, from *solus Christus*, Christ alone, all *soli Deo gloria*, to the glory of God alone. These 5 Solas are important because only Christ is the Lord of salvation. Because of what Jesus did in His life, death, burial, and resurrection, you are received by God. You do not earn His grace by or become His child by merit, but by trusting and resting in His Son.

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Lord of the Church

The pope, cardinals, bishops, priests, pastors, and presbyters are not the head of the church, but only Christ. Neither is state. Calvin stood against the city council in Geneva that had the power of excommunication. The keys of the kingdom are committed to the church, and the church doesn't answer to the state for the souls of the sheep. The state does not confer the right to exist upon the church either through tax exempt or non-profit status. The church is the bride of Jesus Christ and exists independently of any governing body. Christians as individuals pay taxes, but since the colonial era churches have not paid taxes in the US. This is as it should be because Christ claims our tithes and the state right to tax His tenth. Even taking more than a tenth of individuals' income is an idolatrous claim. Because Jesus is the head of the church, the state has no right to regulate our speech including the condemnation of sexual immorality, covetous tax structure, ruining girls' sports, usurping parental rights, and whatever insanity they come up with next. The church shouldn't be partisan but should absolutely declare the whole counsel of God which includes rendering to Caesar what is Caesar's, and to God what is God's.

Lord of the Nations

One of the most neglected aspects today of the Reformed faith is the Magisterial Reformation, meaning the right and duty of the civil magistrate to enforce godly laws. If all authority in heaven and earth is Christ's, then He rules over all lesser authorities. What else could He do as the King of kings and Lord of lords? They will answer to Him and so we should honor God and love our neighbors by holding them to it. The Westminster Confession 1789, Chapter 23.2 states: "It is lawful for Christians to accept and execute the office of a magistrate, when called thereunto: in the managing whereof, as they ought especially to maintain piety, justice, and peace, according to the wholesome laws of each commonwealth; so, for that end, they may lawfully, now under the New Testament, wage war, upon just and necessary occasion." Christians may be called into office and there ought to maintain piety, justice and peace. 23.3 says, "Civil magistrates may not assume to themselves the administration of the Word and sacraments; or the power of the keys of the kingdom of heaven; or, in the least, interfere in the matter so faith. Yet, as nursing fathers, it is the duty of civil magistrates to protect the Church of our common Lord, without giving the preference to any denomination of Christians above the rest, in such a manner that all ecclesiastical persons whatever shall enjoy the full, free, and unquestioned liberty of discharging every part of their sacred functions, without violence or danger." The phrase "nursing fathers" is from Isaiah 49:23 where the Lord will remember Zion and the nations will come to her: "Kings shall be your foster fathers and their queens your nursing mothers; they shall bow down to you with their faces to the earth, and lick up the dust of your feet. Then you will know that I am the Lord, for they shall not be ashamed who wait for Me." The reformers understood well the separation of church and state, but they also understood that Christ is Lord of both. Kings ought to act as nursing fathers to the church, and to the extent they do so and rule justly, a nation will thrive. To the extent a nation rebels against God in its laws, customs, and culture, it will suffer. To extent it honors Him, the people will thrive: "For he is God's minister to you for good" (Rom. 13:4). Christians should want just rulers and laws because we want a society in which the gospel can flourish (1 Tim. 2:1-2). We must seek Christ and His kingdom first, knowing that everything else will follow. He is the Lord of all.