

God's Word Is Missional

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[0 : 00] Well, good morning again. We are nearing the end of a sermon series that we've been in this fall called Read, Mark, Learn, and we've been studying the doctrine of Scripture. We've been looking at the relationship that we have with God through His Word. We've been looking at some of the characteristics, some of the attributes of Scripture to better understand how is it that we read and study God's Word? How is it that we relate to God through His Word? We've looked at the truth, goodness, and beauty of Scripture. We've looked at the clarity of Scripture, the sufficiency of Scripture. We've looked at the Bible as a reliable historical document.

In this morning, we come to look at another attribute, another characteristic of God's Word, that God's Word is missional. It's missional. Our world is inundated with information and content. There are thousands, millions of books, articles, videos, podcasts, TV shows, TED Talks, and on and on and on. Our world is saturated with media and information. In such a culture, it's tempting to treat Scripture as just one more source of information, one more way that we consume ideas and media in this huge buffet of content and information. It's tempting to treat the Bible, treat Scripture that way. But this is not how Scripture comes to us. It's not how the Bible talks about itself. To read God's Word isn't just to consume more content and information, but it's to encounter the living God. It is to encounter the God who acts and who speaks. God's Word and His actions are so integral. They're so inseparable. It's impossible to separate them. You can't have one without the other. God created the universe with words. He created the universe by speaking.

God speaks and things happen. His words and His actions are inseparable. And so when we say the Bible is God's Word, part of what we mean when we say that is that we encounter a God whose words are inseparable from His actions. Another way to say that is that God's Word shows us God's mission.

God's Word is missional. And so we're going to look at that this morning. And we're going to look at two aspects of that. We're going to look at how God's Word reveals the story of God's mission, and we're going to look at how God's Word reveals the shape of His mission, the story of God's mission and the shape of His mission. So first of all, that God's Word reveals the story of His mission.

[3 : 02] It reveals the story of His mission. The Bible comes to us not as a theologyverständious, textbook. It comes to us as an unfolding story about a God who seeks to rescue his good creation from sin and evil and death. And as the story unfolds, we get more and more clarity about how God accomplishes this mission. And some of you who are in the drama of Scripture class may have been studying this this fall, this unfolding drama, this unfolding story of God's word. In Genesis 1, God commissions humanity. He commissions his image bearers to fill all creation with his glory, with his goodness, with his love and justice. God commissions humanity to rule and reign in his place. And that's God's original creation intent. But this original mission in creation gets hijacked, of course, in Genesis 3 in the fall when sin enters the world.

Sin and death come into God's world, not as a natural part of it, but as enemy evil intruders. But just as soon as things go wrong in Genesis 3, we have a promise from God. We have a promise from God that he will one day destroy these enemies of sin and death. And when he says in Genesis 3 that the seed of the woman will crush the head of the serpent. And how exactly God is going to fulfill this promise in Genesis 3 remains to be seen until Genesis 12. And in Genesis 12, God makes a covenant with Abraham that through this one man, Abraham, and through his family, God is going to bless all the nations of the earth. God's mission to redeem his good creation, to push back the effects of the fall and sin and death, is going to happen through Abraham's family. And how exactly that's going to work, how God is going to redeem his creation through Abraham's family, becomes even more clear in the story of Israel, in the Exodus. In the Exodus, we see that God rescues Israel from slavery in Egypt.

And he commissions them to be a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. And he says to them, if you live in covenant relationship with me, and if you keep my law, not only are you going to flourish, not only are you going to thrive, but through you, I'm going to bless all the nations of the earth, just like I promised to Abraham. God's promise to Abraham is fulfilled in the story of Israel. And as the story of Israel unfolds, we get even more clarity into how God is going to do that when we see God's eternal covenant with David in 2 Samuel. So you have the story of Israel unfolding, and that comes in a sharper focus in 2 Samuel, when God promises to establish God's throne forever through the line and kingship of David. And so it's through this king who embodies all that Israel is supposed to be, that God is going to rescue the world, that he's going to save and bless all the nations, restore all of creation, defeat sin and death once and for all through this Davidic king.

And that, in a nutshell, is kind of the story of God's mission in the Old Testament. And all of these aspects of this story, they build on each other, they culminate on each other, and they find their fulfillment ultimately in Jesus Christ. Jesus is the true image of her who fulfills that original creation mandate to extend God's glory and his character to all creation. Jesus is Abraham's true offspring, through whom all the nations come to be blessed. Jesus is the true Israel who kept God's law and intercedes for the world as a priest, and he's the true Davidic king who sits on God's throne, who sits on David's throne, and whose kingdom lasts forever. Jesus's life, his death, his resurrection, and his ascension are the climax of this story because they are the ultimate and decisive events in God's mission to rescue his world and defeat sin and death once and for all. And so this Sunday in the church calendar is Christ the King Sunday. Would it be more helpful if I turn this off and use one of these microphones? Are we on? Okay, great. Sometimes you just got to go with your gut, right? So Jesus, his life and his death and his resurrection are the climaxed true king who has come to rescue his good world. And so this story of God's mission that starts in creation, that goes throughout the Old

Testament, is fulfilled in Christ. Now all of this is important because all of this is in the background in Matthew chapter 28 when Jesus gives this mission to his disciples, this mission that we call the Great Commission. This whole story, all of these things about Jesus being the true king, all of this is in the background as Jesus says to his disciples in Matthew 28, all authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. And this makes sense if you've been following the story up to this point.

[8 : 23] This is a statement of a victorious king who has conquered his enemies. All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. You can't make a bigger statement. So it's a statement of a victorious king and it is also a recommissioning. It's a recommissioning of humanity's job description in Genesis chapter 1. Just as in Genesis chapter 1 in that passage that we read earlier, God tells humanity to fill the earth with his glory, with people who bear his image. So in Matthew 28, Jesus tells his disciples to fill the earth with the glory of God, with people who are his disciples, with people who follow him. And that's because following Jesus is about the restoration of God, of the image of God and humanity. So Matthew 28 is this, not only this great commission, it's this great recommissioning of Genesis chapter 1. And so what is that mission? Well, in verses 18 through 20, Jesus says, go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, the Son, the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always to the end of the age. And before we dive into more about the details of this great commission,

I think it's important to pause and reflect on who Jesus is giving this great commission to. Who is he speaking to? He's speaking to his ragtag band of blue-collar disciples who are uneducated and unqualified in the eyes of the world. It's to these flawed, broken, sinful men and women that Jesus says, go and make disciples of all nations.

And I don't know about you, but that sounds to me like the worst strategy in the world. Like Jesus is the king of all things. He's just said, all authority in heaven and earth belongs to me. And he is the one who gives away his mission. I mean, wouldn't it be better if he just did everything and accomplished everything himself? I think it's kind of like having a game of pickup basketball in your neighborhood park, playing a game of three-on-three basketball, and LeBron James is on your team. And you're just playing like your friends. LeBron James is on your team, and he just keeps passing you the basketball. And you're like, LeBron, stop passing me the basketball. Just dunk on these guys. Like you're one of the greatest players of all time. Right? That's kind of what it's like. But the beauty of the biblical story is that God always restores in redemption what he starts in creation. He commissions humanity once again to join in what he's doing. He rescues lost humanity

and turns to us and says, here's the ball. I'm giving you the ball. By grace, we have been invited into the greatest mission in the universe. By grace, we have been invited into the greatest story ever told. And so if you're here this morning and you're wondering, does my life have any meaning at all? Does my life have any purpose at all? This is it. This is it right here. What greater story could your life be part of? What greater mission could your life be part of than the redemption and the restoration of all things through Jesus, the King who has already conquered sin and death in our place?

And this is really important as we think about our relationship with Scripture because this is why being immersed in Scripture, being immersed in not just the content of Scripture, but being immersed in the story of Scripture is so important. We spend a lot of time talking about the different attributes of Scripture in this series about how, why, and how we should study God's Word. But another reason why we should study Scripture and be immersed in it is so that we know how to live out God's mission that he has given to us. Among the many questions that we should be asking when we read and study God's Word is what does this teach me about the nature of what God is up to? What does this teach me about the nature of God's mission? And how does it equip me to play a part in it? How does it equip me to play my part in it? The Improvised Shakespeare Company is a theater group in Chicago. It was founded in 2005, and they do what their name says. They put on improvised Shakespeare plays, which sounds kind of crazy.

[13:08] But what they do is they start the show by asking the audience for a random title, a random word, a random phrase that becomes the title of the show. And then they proceed to improvise an entire story, an entire play based on just that title. But they do it in entirely Shakespeare language, entirely Shakespeare style, rhythm, characters, even plot structure follows a kind of Shakespearean style and ethos. And their website says this about their performances. It says, nothing has been planned out, rehearsed, or written. All of the dialogue is said for the first time, the characters are created as you watch. And if you've ever, if you're ever wondering where the story is going, so are they. And the reviews are amazing. The reviews are, I've never seen it myself, but from what the reviews say, it's incredibly entertaining. This is a critically acclaimed show.

They've won many awards. And I don't know about you, but I have to ask, how in the world could actors improv an entire Shakespeare play? And the actors can do this because they have utterly immersed themselves in Shakespeare's works. They have utterly immersed themselves in all of his plays, all of his works, all of his characters. And they have so immersed themselves in it that it has become a part of them.

They know the language and the stories and the character and the style by heart. They know it by heart. It just becomes part of them. And friends, this is a picture of what it looks like to be immersed in God's Word. Not just that we know all of this content, but that we know how to live out the story of God's mission. How do you know how to live out the mission of God at a tech startup? How do you know how to live out the mission of God at a university? On the hill, working for a non-profit at a law firm, as a teacher, as a parent, as a spouse, as a grandparent? How do you know how to live out God's mission in all of these different spheres and vocations? You have to be immersed in the story of God's Word. When we study God's Word, we need not only to ask questions about personal application, how does this apply to my personal life? But we also need to ask questions about cosmic redemption.

How does this passage show me the grand story of God to redeem and to reconcile all things through Jesus, of which I get to play a part, of which I get to play a role? That is what it looks like to be immersed in the story of God. So first, God's Word reveals the story of God's mission.

And secondly, God's Word reveals to us the shape of his mission, the shape of his mission. So in Matthew 28, Jesus gives his disciples the great commission, the great recommissioning in Genesis 1, and he says, go and make disciples of all nations, every tribe, tongue, and nation of all different ethnic groups, baptizing them in the name of the Father, the Son, the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I've commanded you. And so the shape of this mission involves both proclamation and demonstration. It involves the words of the gospel and the deeds and the actions of the gospel. There's a popular saying that gets quoted sometimes in some different Christian religious circles. I don't know who this was actually originated by, but there is this phrase, there is this saying that says, preach the gospel at all times, if necessary, use words. Preach the gospel at all times, if necessary, use words. And I just want to say that that is entirely wrong. It is impossible

to preach the gospel without words. Why? Because the gospel isn't about you. The gospel isn't about us. It is about the finished work of Christ who is a suffering and conquering king. That is news. And that news has to be proclaimed with words. Even your most holy and loving life, even my most holy and loving life isn't good enough for somebody's sins to be forgiven and for them to be united to a relationship with God.

[17 : 57] No one is going to look and observe my life and just conclude, you know, there's probably a holy God who I'm separated from, who I probably need my sins to be forgiven. And there's one mediator between God is man and his name and Jesus. And I believe if I believe in him, I'll have everlasting life and I'll have the Holy Spirit. Like no one's going to look at my life and conclude that. Like no one's going to get to that conclusion. Why? Because the gospel is a message that has to be proclaimed. And so the mission of the church making disciples of Jesus involves, has to involve the proclamation of God's word in preaching and teaching, sharing the gospel and evangelism, in public settings, private settings, one-on-one, in homes and neighborhoods, in schools. You cannot have the mission of God without the proclamation of God's word. But you also can't have the mission of God without the demonstration of God's word, without the demonstration, the loving actions and deeds of the gospel. In Matthew 28, Jesus says, we're to make disciples of all nations, baptizing them and teaching them to obey everything I've commanded you.

Well, what is it that Jesus has commanded us? What is everything that Jesus has commanded us? How would you summarize that? Well, we actually summarize it every Sunday in our liturgy. The summary of everything that Christ has commanded us is to commands, love God with everything that you have and love your neighbor as yourself. We're to make disciples of Jesus who love God and who love neighbor. Mature disciples of Jesus are people who know what it looks like to love. They're people who know what it looks like to love God and love neighbor in every area of life. And so integrating our faith in our workplace, serving our city, feeding the hungry, parenting children, caring for refugees, these are all ways in which we participate in God's mission because they are ways that we love God and love our neighbor.

And you might say, well, you know, a lot of non-religious people do these things. A lot of secular people do these things. So what's the difference? What's the difference between us doing these things and them doing these things? Well, there's a lot of things we could talk about, but the main difference, the primary difference, is our demonstration of the gospel, our demonstration of God's word, is always and necessarily married to the proclamation of God's word. You can't have proclamation without demonstration. Proclamation without demonstration is like telling somebody to dance to a song, but only giving them the lyrics. Like, that's just going to look really awkward. If you tell someone to dance to a song, but you only give them the words, you only give them the lyrics, there's no music. Demonstration without proclamation is like telling somebody to sing a song they've never heard by just playing the instruments and by not giving them the words, not giving them the lyrics. And friends, we have the greatest song in the universe for people to hear. It will make all of creation sing and dance. And so we have to play a song that has the most beautiful lyrics and has the most beautiful music. We have to proclaim the truth of the message and demonstrate the beauty and the goodness of that message through loving action. One of the best modern examples, I think, of bringing together both proclamation and demonstration is the ministry of John Perkins, who is a pastor, author, civil rights activist in Mendenhall, Mississippi, right outside of Jackson.

[21 : 57] And John Perkins had an unusually powerful impact on the Christian community because of how unusually holistic his ministry was. It was unusually holistic. He and his wife founded a number of organizations, the biggest of which is called the Christian Community Development Association. And what's amazing about John Perkins' ministry is that it involved lots of proclamation and lots of demonstration.

It involved evangelism, sharing the gospel, teaching, preaching, vacation Bible school for kids, addressing Bible literacy for poor communities, for people on the margins in this small town, people who were on the fringes of society, proclaiming the gospel to them, teaching the Bible to them. But his ministry also involved lots of demonstration, helping people at the margins with food and housing. They started daycares. They started health clinics. They helped people register to vote. They helped desegregate schools. They did ministry in prisons, after school groups, youth summer camps. And it goes on and on and on. The breadth and the scope of John Perkins' ministry is enormous, and its legacy continues today.

And if you read John Perkins' writings, if you read his books, you become aware that there's a deep sense of how integral and inseparable proclamation and demonstration are. In his book, *A Quiet Revolution*, he talks about how their ministry in Mississippi began with lots of Bible teaching and evangelism.

That's actually where they started, by sharing the gospel with people who were on the margins in Mendenhall, Mississippi. But they quickly learned that proclamation and demonstration need each other.

[23 : 42] And so he talks about this in his book, *A Quiet Revolution*. And he talks about what he calls real evangelism, real evangelism. He says, real evangelism brings a person face to face with all the needs of a person. It is cruel to share the words of life with a person without also sharing the things that a person needs to live, James chapter 2. But also we can get caught in the shallows of paternalism if we help meet people's physical needs without sharing with them the understanding that they can have a new quality of life with God that lasts forever. Real evangelism brings us face to face with all the needs of people and then reaches out to them to make them whole. I think that's a beautiful picture of the inseparable nature of the proclamation and demonstration of God's mission.

But perhaps the clearest place to see real evangelism is the ministry of Jesus Christ himself. Jesus came preaching and he came healing. He taught in the synagogue and he fed the 5,000. He forgave people's sins and he restored people's bodies. He brought a salvation. He brought a gospel. He brought a kingdom that restores the whole person because he is the king of all things. He reigns over all things and he has come to restore all of creation. And so that is what we mean when we say that the Bible is God's word, that God's word is missional, that invites us both the story of God's mission and it invites us into the shape of his mission. And so we have to, if we're going to live out that mission of our lives, we have to immerse ourselves in it. Not just looking to the Bible to be a source of more content, but to be a story that we actually inhabit and embody in our everyday lives.

And the word of God also empowers us to take that mission out to the world through word and deed, through proclamation and demonstration. But if you're anything like me, and we think about the the bigness, the vastness, the grandeur of God's mission, it's easy to feel sometimes overwhelmed by all this, overwhelmed by the grandeur of the story of God, by its scope, by its size, its mission. I mean, the Great Commission is to make disciples of all nations. I mean, there's no greater mission than that. It's also sometimes intimidating to figure out what this looks like in the ordinariness of life. It's intimidating to figure out what does this look like for me in the complexity of today's culture that we live in. Thinking about this practically can sometimes be intimidating and overwhelming, but what I want us to see is that if this is what we're part of, if this is what we're invited into, then God promises to be with us through his word. As I think about living out God's mission in my own life, I think, man, I need help to do that. I need grace. I need power. I need wisdom. I need discernment.

I need encouragement. I need motivation. I need examples for how to do this. Where am I going to find that? Where am I going to find all this? We find it in God's word. The power we need, the encouragement we need, the wisdom that we need, the examples that we need, the motivation we need, all comes to us through God's word, and God's word is where God is present in Jesus Christ through the power of the spirit. The beauty of the Great Commission is the last line that often goes unmentioned, and Jesus says, Behold, I am with you always to the very end of the age. In verse 20, Christ is present in his word by his Holy Spirit to empower us for his mission. We are not on our own, and having that promise of his spirit, of his presence with us through his word, it not only invites us to participate in the grander of the story of God's word, but it drives us again and again into God himself, into his arms, into his presence, into his peace, and into his love. Let's pray. Lord, we give you thanks that you are king, that you're the king of kings and the Lord of lords, and Lord, you not only accomplish redemption for us, but you invite us into your story. You invite us into your mission. Lord, give us grace to follow you, to obey you in every area of our lives, in every place where you've called us to live out on mission.

[28 : 46] God, thank you that you're with us. Thank you that you promise to empower us to live out the mission that you've called us to. In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.