

The Story: Paul's Mission

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Date: 26 April 2020

Preacher: Kent Dixon

[0 : 00] Good morning. Welcome to everyone. I'm going to be reading a short devotion first at the beginning this morning before we begin our service.

I'm going to be reading a short devotion before we begin our service this morning to give people a chance to come in and to give those who are here a chance to reflect. This morning's devotion is called Be Patient, and it reflects on Romans 12, verse 12, which says, Rejoicing in Hope, Patient in Tribulation, Continuing Instant Prayer.

Think of the kernels of grain, the seed that the farmer plants in the ground in the fall of the year. How patient the farmer must be.

Through the long cold winter, the seed is dormant. There's no evidence at all that it's there, covered by the cold earth itself. The snows come and go.

The ground freezes and thaws. Does the farmer lie awake at night worrying that those seeds he's placed in the ground may be ineffective? He does not. He knows that the spring will come.

[1 : 14] And in due course, the sunshine of March or April warms the air. Spring waters rain on the ground. The farmer knows then that it will not be long until green shoots suddenly break out from the covering of the earth.

And in their own time, great wavering fields of grain are ready for the harvest. The farmer's faith is the seed he planted fully justified.

Likewise, God wants us to be patient with every prayer and petition we sincerely send up to the heavenly altar. Our praying done in the spirit cannot be ineffective.

It's as though God is saying to us, The effective prayers of righteous men and women.

Amen. Be patient and put your trust in me day by day. A short prayer. Lord, give me a patient, steadfast faith with a willingness to wait for the harvest.

[2 : 29] Amen. Well, good morning for folks who have joined in. I've just read a short devotion to give us an introduction to the sermon this morning and just give folks a chance to jump in.

So good morning and welcome to our online service for Sunday, April 26, 2020. My name is Kent Dixon and I'm the lead pastor for Bramard Baptist Church in Edmonton, Alberta, Canada.

Welcome this morning to people from our church who are tuning in. And I also want to welcome others who are listening or watching this morning. Please check out the summary information below this video, which includes a link to our website, an email address to send in prayer requests and other information.

If you're watching us on Facebook, I invite you to like our page on Facebook and then you'll receive notifications when we go live as we've done this morning or any other things that we post.

So we appreciate you liking us on Facebook, following us on Instagram and generally staying connected with some of the online things that we're doing in this time of COVID-19.

[3 : 44] So please check out that information in the posting below, the information below this video. As well, as you can imagine, even though we are not meeting in person as a church, church expenses continue.

There are costs for staff. There are costs for building maintenance. There are costs for ministries that we support and commitments that we've made as a church.

So if you are a member of Braemar Baptist or you're someone who attends Braemar Baptist regularly, or if you just feel God is calling you this morning to contribute to the ministry of our church, I encourage you to do that.

There are certain definitely ways to do it. You can set up Braemar as a payee on your electronic banking, and that's using the email address donations at braemarbaptist.com.

As well, you can go to our website and there's more information about donations. If you send an email to info at braemarbaptist.com, we can also add you to our email newsletter and there's information about donations in there.

[4 : 52] So I do encourage you, as we get closer to the middle of the end of the month, traditional ways of giving, obviously passing the offering plate, or dropping an envelope off at the church when you're at the service are not the normal avenues right now.

So our church is open from 10 to 11 a.m. on Tuesday and Friday mornings if you want to drop off a donation. And you can also call the office.

If you go to braemarbaptist.com, you can phone the office and arrange to have a donation or a tithe envelope picked up from your home as well. We're happy to do that.

So I do encourage you to please remember that even though we're just meeting online and maybe you're sitting in your jammies having a cup of coffee right now in your home, remember please that God's ministry at Braemar does require funding.

And so we appreciate you giving in support of that. So as I was preparing my sermon this week, it was so nice to be able to sit next to an open window.

[5 : 56] I often sit at my kitchen table and prepare my sermons for the week. And so I was sitting next to an open window and feeling the warm breeze, seeing the sunshine outside.

We live in a northern climate and finally we have no snow. So it's beautiful springtime weather these days. And so it was nice to be able to listen to the sounds of the birds singing and listen to children playing just down the street.

And it's moments like this when we realize that there's a greater plan at work. Despite how serious health concerns are, despite how dire the information we get in the news every day can be right now around the world, my friends, there is hope.

The sun will rise tomorrow as it always has. And God's plan is far greater than we can imagine. So I want you to take comfort in that, that there is a plan and we're in it and we're within God's control.

I want to tell you a story as we begin this morning. Most of you know that I'm very fond of stories and I come from a long genetic line of storytellers. A little boy was asked by his Sunday school teacher, why is it important for us to be quiet in church?

[7 : 14] Why is it important for us to be quiet in church? The boy thought for a moment before he replied, because people are sleeping? See, that's definitely one of the challenges for pastors preaching these days.

Normally we can see the people in the pews. I can see the people who are sleeping. I can see the people who have to go to the washroom. I can see the people refilling their coffee.

And there's comfort in that for me as well. So this morning we're going to continue in our series on the story. And I don't want to lose anyone to sleep. So if you're sitting comfortably in your living room watching, you're wearing your jammies, you're drinking your coffee, stay focused because I promise it will be worth it.

So throughout our exploration of the story over these past many weeks, we've recognized that God acted and has acted through his people, the nation of Israel.

He acted through Israel to win people back to himself, even though Israel failed in many ways. And as we've considered over the past few weeks in the Gospels, we read about God sending his son, Jesus Christ, to win us back by dying on the cross for us.

[8 : 37] In that selfless and sacrificial act, Jesus solved a big problem called sin. As we learned last week when we looked at the book of Acts, and also in the New Testament epistles or letters, we see God using the church.

We see God using us now to find his lost children and bring them home. We always need to remember that when we're gathered in one place or separated by social distancing and self-quarantine as we are now.

We are the church. We remain the church. As the Apostle Paul said in 1 Corinthians 12, verse 27, now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it.

It's impossible for us to consider the New Testament and the growth of the early church without considering the Apostle Paul. I could easily preach many years' worth of sermons on Paul and his writing and his impact and his legacy and just barely scratch the surface on Paul's significance for furthering God's plan for humanity.

And his role in spreading the good news, even to this day, people pick up a Bible for the first time, read the words of the Apostle Paul, and their lives are changed.

[10 : 15] But this morning, we're going to explore that a bit together, just a little bit, with our sermon titled, Paul's Mission. Now, the message of hope was being spread all over the world, particularly through the Apostle Paul, who had an intentional commitment to communicate this wonderful message of Jesus.

While Paul was not one of Jesus' original 12 disciples, you may or may not have known that, Paul's significance in the early church, his significance to Christianity, and human history, even, cannot be overstated.

Did you know that of the 27 books of the New Testament, 13 or 14, depending on which scholars you refer to, 13 or 14 of the New Testament books are originally attributed to Paul.

13 or 14 out of 27, that is roughly 28% of the New Testament. That's pretty prolific stuff. Paul first appears on the scene in the book of Acts as a man who fiercely and relentlessly persecuted the early followers of Jesus.

We read in the book of Acts that Jesus himself drew the lost Paul back to him when he appeared to Paul as he traveled on the road to Damascus.

[11 : 47] So as a bit of an aside, because I'm a reader and just reading lots of great books lately, a bit of an aside, I've recently read, been reading a biography of the Apostle Paul by theologian N.T. Wright.

I'll zoom that in a little bit. N.T. Wright. And I highly, highly recommend it. It's very good. And it's Paul that we have to thank for much of the theology that we consider to be essential to Christian belief today.

For Paul, it was central to recognize the church as the body of Christ in the world. Assembled together, not necessarily literally together, but considered together.

When we are considered together as a body of believers around the world, the church is Jesus. We are to think like Jesus, act like Jesus, and love each other and others just as Jesus loved.

Last week, when we considered Acts 1 chapter, or Acts 1 verse 8, pardon me, the Bible says there, but you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.

[13 : 17] And you'll probably remember if you were listening last or watching last week, I talked about this being similar to a pebble dropped in a large body of water. The concentric ripples happen.

So that initial impact, the initial events that happened in Acts, have continued to ripple throughout history as Christianity has expanded and expanded, and as God has drawn more and more of his children back to him.

And with those words, Jesus commissioned the church. He gave us our marching orders. He told us to go into the world and be like him, be like Jesus.

So I have a question for you this morning. How are you doing with your marching orders? Are you being intentional about carrying them out? People from our church will laugh because intentional and intentionality has become my buzzword for this year.

How are you doing with those orders? Do you recognize that you may have accepted Jesus' offer of salvation to you, but that's kind of where you stopped?

[14 : 36] Have you seen the salvation of Jesus as something that was really meant just for you? Even if you don't do that intentionally. It's maybe not a conscious thing that you're doing, but do you keep the greatest news of all humanity to yourself?

I challenge you to reflect on that not just today but going forward in your life. If you have accepted Jesus, consider how you may have been living your life.

Consider how you may have been sharing that news or not. and ask God now that you have time to pray and reflect in these days.

Ask God about that. Ask Him to open your eyes and broaden your perspective to see the opportunities to be an agent of change for God's kingdom in your day-to-day life.

And you can say, well, Pastor Kent, that's all fine and dandy, but what am I supposed to do? I'm stuck at home. You have the same tools that I have right now. Facebook, phone, email, Instagram, Skype, Zoom.

[15 : 55] The list goes on and on. You have more tools available to you now to communicate the gospel and to interact with others and to show care and love than ever before.

God didn't intend for the good news to stop with you. God wants all people in the furthest reaches of the earth to hear the good news of salvation in Jesus Christ.

As Paul said in Romans 1, 16, for I am not ashamed of the gospel because it's the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes.

Amen? We recognize this morning that God raised up a point leader. He raised up a head guy to take the gospel to the ends of the earth as Jesus had foretold to start that process.

And that point leader was Paul. Saul of Tarsus. As Paul was known before his conversion, Saul was the least likely candidate to become the world's first and most renowned missionary.

[17 : 13] We read in Acts 9 that Saul uttered murderous threats towards the followers of Jesus and he even sought the approval of Jewish leaders in the synagogues to take early followers of Jesus as prisoners.

Saul had a singular focus. Described as one author I read as the Osama bin Laden of his day, Saul hated Jesus.

He hated him. He hated the idea of what he stood for. He hated the church and he hunted down and vowed to kill Christians.

It's as simple as that. Saul began his career as a radical Jewish scholar who was so convinced that Christians were wrong that he had them imprisoned and stoned.

Later in his life as he wrote to the church in Corinth Paul expressed amazement that Jesus chose him to spread the gospel.

[18 : 18] Can you imagine that? Enemy number one becomes choice number one. As I've said before Paul's impact on the mission of God cannot be understated because in addition to the prolific writing we have from the apostle Paul in the New Testament, he planted ten churches by himself.

He didn't have a church planting board or a team of people. Paul planted those churches. According to some theologians, the book of Galatians, another one of Paul's books, was written during the time of the great Jerusalem council, it was called.

And we read about this council in Acts 15. And so we're wondering, we wonder now, what's the significance? What was the significance of that council? Well, one thing that I found interesting is that Paul himself never wrote about it.

He never reflected on it. He never said, you know, if there were three things that I learned from that council, it was this, this, and this. Nope. Paul didn't even reflect on it.

But just as with later councils that were held during church history, and if you're a church history person, or you've studied church history, or you're aware of church history, you will know that there are different councils, the council of Constantinople, the council of Nicaea.

[19 : 44] So out of those things, as I talked many sermon series ago, as we talked about creeds, a lot of creeds, things that we believe in, lists of things that are essential to our faith, were established or clarified during councils like this.

So the main question at this great Jerusalem council was whether Gentiles had to become Jews in practice to be considered true Christians.

Christians. And so some Jewish leaders at the time said Gentiles had to do two things to become Christians. One, this one will be obvious, believe in Jesus Christ.

And two, to be circumcised. So in other words, practice Jewish laws of which circumcision was one. And this Jewish council, the Jerusalem council, ultimately concluded that Gentiles do not have to submit to Jewish laws to be considered Christians.

Belief and allegiance to Jesus Christ was enough. So if you're interested in learning more about that council, you know, you've got a lot of time on your hands.

[21 : 03] Good time to study church history. Paul, writing in the book of Galatians, argues for the reasons behind the decision. So, while Paul doesn't talk about the council itself, he does recognize and talk about some of the resulting things that happened in Christian faith and belief, especially in relation to Jews and Gentiles going forward.

So why is Paul's mission to the world, to the rest of the earth, important to us today, where we are at right now?

Well, I'm going to suggest a few things for us to consider this morning. First, I can assume, I think fairly safely, that most of us are Gentiles.

So it's because of Paul's mission, because of his perspective on Jewish and Gentile believers, that we, as Gentiles, are invited into salvation.

Paul helped clear the way for that. He helped clarify that that was Jesus' intention all along. second, the book of Acts is our story.

[22 : 14] And I've talked to you before about people often have a perspective that, well, I'm reading the Old Testament, I'm reading the New Testament, there are some things I can pull out of it, but it doesn't really apply to me.

It happened a long time ago, it's the story of other people. Well, I hope over this series of this story, you've come to recognize this story is our story.

It's still our story. As believers of Christ, as believers who follow Christ, and are seeking to spread the good news to others around the world, to contribute to God's mission, to draw his children back to him, this is our story.

So the things we read about are the acts of our local church, that's what's intended to be. The acts of the local church in the New Testament are supposed to still be happening today.

We're supposed to be doing the same things they did, spreading the gospel, caring for one another, contributing to their community, helping those in need.

[23 : 19] Third, the mission of the church as the larger body is also meant to be our personal mission. And I touched on this already about sharing the gospel.

We are to be Jesus to our Jerusalem, to our Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth. This is our personal mission just as well as it's the corporate mission of the church.

As I said last week, as followers of Jesus, we've been given orders by our commander. And those orders are as valid today as they were when they were first given.

I have another question for you this morning. Do you have people in your life who don't know Jesus? Have you ever considered how your friendship or your relationship with them has given you the trust and connection through which you can tell them about Jesus?

As I've said to people many times before, and I have friends who are pastors who say this as well, we can preach great sermons, we can share the gospel, we can teach and preach and care for people as pastors, but ultimately the best way to get people to come to your church, the best way to get people to hear the truth and the story of Jesus and salvation is through relationship.

[24 : 48] It's through an existing relationship that you already have with people. So it's not about sitting back, it's about stepping in. Have you ever heard the expression preaching to the choir?

That expression has come to mean that the person we're speaking to likely already agrees with what we're saying. They've already bought in to what we're saying.

But I want to challenge you this morning. If your life is filled only with other Christians, hear that.

If your life, if your day, if your week, if your interactions, your friendships, your relationships consist primarily of only other Christians, if the people you're already connected with already know about Jesus, then how can you accomplish your mission?

Does that make sense? We've been called to introduce Jesus to people who don't already know him. Not to spend all our time exclusively in the company of other people who already follow him.

[26 : 03] And now I'm not discounting the value of meeting as a local church. I miss that very much. I miss all of the people in my church. I reflect on them, I pray for them, I see their faces in my mind.

So I do miss that. And some of my greatest friendships are with people who also are committed followers of Jesus Christ. But at the same time, the responses that I've gotten from friends and relatives over the years who have seen what I profess to stand for, and hopefully I'm an example of, and have reflected back to me and said, you know what, I may not believe what you do, but you stand for, you behave the way, in a way that reflects what you stand for.

You walk the talk, in other words. So we've been called to introduce people to Jesus who don't already know him.

I'd like you to do something, not for me, but for yourself and in your relationship with God. Pray earnestly for the opportunity to share the good news of Jesus.

Share the good news of salvation with someone new this week. I had an interaction with a cashier at Home Depot last weekend, and she asked me how I was doing, I asked how she was doing, and I said to her, well, I'm a pastor, so ultimately I believe God's in control no matter what happens.

[27 : 40] And she lit right up and said, oh, you believe in Jesus, so do I. And so we had such a great moment of affirmation together. So those kinds of interactions will also happen with you and people who maybe don't know Jesus.

And I'm not saying you need to pull out your Bible and work your way through the Romans road and lead them to salvation immediately on the spot. God. But as I talked about in the reflection that I read right at the beginning, we're farmers.

We are fishermen, fisher people. So the seeds that we plant, God will water faithfully. Someone else will come and work on that seed again.

We'll work on that crop. Ultimately, it may not even be us to cultivate that relationship to the point of leading someone to Jesus. this. But at the same time, we're called to step in.

So I encourage you to do that. And if you're listening or watching this morning and you really have little or no idea what I'm talking about, but you're at least curious, please reach out and ask.

[28 : 50] You can even send a direct message through Facebook or email info at bramarbaptist.com and ask. Because I'd be happy to start a conversation with you.

I'd be happy to pray for you and pray with you. Because in this time of uncertainty, in this time of insecurity and worry and panic and so many different things, God is still in control.

God has a plan for you. God has a plan for the entire world and all of creation. It will be okay. I'm going to steal a quote that I heard from somebody this week.

week. They said, we may not all be on the same island right now, but we are all in the same boat. What a beautiful statement.

We're not on the same island. We're on different islands and we're isolated from one another physically, but we are in the same boat. We're in this together. We can pray for each other. We can speak to each other and care for one another.

[29 : 51] Because as I said earlier, there are so many tools for us to do that. So if you're wondering, as I said, if you don't know, if you're curious and want to know more, please reach out to me because a relationship with Jesus will help you to manage the unknown of what you're facing right now.

And you'll probably find that it will help you realize the world is a lot less scary than you actually have thought. Let's pray. Dear God, thank you that you are in control.

Thank you that you are the God of everything, that none of this has surprised you. None of this is news to you or caught you unaware. Father, we can take comfort in the fact that through Jesus, we can come to you with our worries.

We can come to you with our cares. We can come to you with our needs. And you will hear our prayers, Father, and you will answer them in your way and in your timing. And Father, may we remember to come before you with praise.

May we come before you to thank you for sunny days and the ways that you've provided and are continuing to provide for us in ways that we didn't expect. Father, maybe people have lost work, but there is government funding and support available.

[31 : 17] Father, maybe people don't have food, but they can reach out to others who will help them. Or they need to do errands or other things. And Lord, we can be a community that supports one another.

We're only a phone call away, an email away. Thank you, God, for the many blessings of technology that we have that allow us to be connected and in community together, even during these days.

And God, thank you for your son, Jesus Christ. So close to Easter, we still reflect on the amazing gift of his sacrifice, his death, and his resurrection, Father, that we may be reunited not only with you and with your son, Jesus, but with one another who believe in Jesus as we die.

So, Father, I pray for comfort this week. I pray for care and peace for people. I pray that you would ease anxieties and worries and that you would bring joy in the face of any sort of unsureness or any sort of uncertainty.

Father, bring peace and joy. And Father, for those who are suffering with health concerns unrelated to COVID-19, Lord, I pray that you would continue to bring healing to them.

[32 : 34] And Father, as I close our prayer this morning, I ask that you bring comfort to the many, many people who have been affected by the shooting last weekend in Nova Scotia, Canada.

Lord, so many families have been affected. So many people have been hurt. So many people have been left with holes in their lives. Father, draw near to them. Bring comfort.

Bring peace. Bring connection with others who care for them in a very real and tangible way. And Lord, we thank you that you love us, you see us, and you care for us in your great mercy.

We pray all these things in the name of your Son, Jesus Christ. Amen. I want to close this morning with a benediction from the book of Jude.

Jude is one of the shortest books in the Bible, and it's one of my favorites. Not because it's short. Although people will say, it's a short book, you're a short pastor, I get the connection. Wrong. It's a great book.

[33 : 30] So if you have time this week, and you probably do, read the book of Jude. Here's the benediction for this morning. Now to him who is able to keep you from stumbling and to present you blameless before the presence of his glory with great joy.

To the only God, our Savior, through Jesus Christ, our God, our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion, and authority before all time, and now, and forever.

Amen. Go in peace, and have a great week, and remember your mission. Amen. Amen.