

Participating in the Mission of the Risen Jesus

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[0 : 0 0] Just a reminder that next week we'll begin our series looking at the themes of the Apostles' Creed. So next week we believe in God, the Father Almighty, the Maker of heaven and earth. How does that help us to understand our faith? How will that help us to share our faith? We're going to read now Acts chapter 10 from verse 34 to verse 43. That's on page 1104 if you're using a church Bible.

Again we have Peter, again a very different context. Now he's in Cornelius' house, a Roman soldier. Then Peter began to speak. I now realize how true it is that God does not show favoritism, but accepts from every nation the one who fears him and does what is right.

You know the message God sent to the people of Israel, announcing the good news of peace through Jesus Christ who is Lord of all. You know what has happened throughout the province of Judea, beginning in Galilee after the baptism that John preached, how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and power, and how he went around doing good and healing all who are under the power of the devil because God was with him. We are witnesses of everything he did in the country of the Jews and in Jerusalem. They killed him by hanging him on a cross, but God raised him from the dead on the third day and caused him to be seen. He was not seen by all the people, but by witnesses whom God had already chosen, by us who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead.

He commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that he is the one whom God appointed as judge of the living and the dead. All the prophets testify about him that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name. Amen. Three texts, different settings, very similar themes. So we're thinking about our third privilege. We thought about the privilege of hearing God's words together.

Thinking about preaching, we've thought about the privilege of praying to God together. Now we're thinking about being on the mission of the risen Jesus together. And to help us to get into this topic, I want to introduce a figure who will be familiar to some of us, others not so much, perhaps.

[2 : 3 2] Count Nikolaus von Zinzendorf. At least one person will have heard. Zach is away preaching. I'm glad. He knows church history. I have to know it. But von Zinzendorff is associated with the Moravian missionary movement. Listen to this. This is what Zinzendorff said. He was a very wealthy man. He was a king.

This is what he said. He said, I have but one passion. It is he. It is he alone. The world is the field, and the field is the world. And henceforth, that country shall be my home where I can be most used in winning souls for Christ. So, Zinzendorff was connected to this 18th century Moravian missions movement. And to read their history is amazing. If you track it down on the internet, find out about the Moravian missionaries. Amazing. So, it began with a community of about 300 Christian refugees who gathered around von Zinzendorff. He obviously had a big house. And after a time, they established a pattern that would last for 10 years of praying around the clock. So, everybody had a shift. So, 24 hours a day, seven days a week. For 10 years, they were praying together, concerned for the glory of the Lord Jesus. And that time of those refugees gathering and of prayer happening became the launching pad for a remarkable mission to the nations. This was a group that went to extremes. I didn't know this until this week, but 29 of them sold themselves into slavery. In the U.S. Virgin Islands, they knew that the white slave owners, they'd heard about

Jesus, but the black slaves hadn't. And so, 29 of these white guys went and became slaves on plantations. 22 of them died to make Jesus known. By the time Zinzendorff died in 1760, 226 missionaries had been sent into 10 different countries. Back to King von Zinzendorff, very wealthy man, very influential man. Why did he prioritize mission? We heard it. I've got one passion. It's Jesus. He knew it was all about Jesus. He wanted to make Jesus known to proclaim salvation in Christ, to go into the world wherever God would send him in order to extend the kingdom of Christ. And it seemed like that whole Moravian mission movement, they got it together.

And that's why it made such an impact. A single concern for the glory of God and for people to hear about salvation through Jesus. That's our great privilege, for the glory of God to bring the good news of salvation to be on mission for the risen and exalted Jesus. Like the church in Acts, our message focuses on Christ, Christ crucified and risen. We go in the power of the Spirit sent by the risen Christ.

And like those Moravians, our movement is to go into the world, recognizing it is his mission field. So as we close up our little reflections at the start of the year on our privileges as the church, my prayer would be that we would capture something of the spirit of those Moravians, something of the spirit of Peter and the apostles, so that we too might embrace and enjoy the privilege of being called into Christ's mission. Let's think a little bit more about that in Acts chapter 4.

[6 : 19] That's going to be the text that we're going to spend a bit of time on just now. Thinking about the message as the message spoke of the risen Lord Jesus. Just to set the scene within the book of Acts, we understand that Luke has many different themes, but a key theme as Luke writes this book is the resurrection. Our first scene, Acts chapter 1, begins with the risen Lord Jesus teaching His disciples before He ascends to heaven. He promises He would send the Spirit, and the church would then spread the witness about Christ through the world. We are led to understand that as much as the book of Acts is about the church, and it's about the Spirit, the mission director, we can use that terminology, the mission director of the church continues to be Jesus by His Spirit through His apostles and followers.

Peter Stuhlmacher, New Testament scholar, writes that the movement of Christianity spreads only by experiencing that Jesus has been raised by God and exalted to His right hand. This is the wonderful news that the apostles and the church shared, the only way to be saved through discovering the risen Lord Jesus as Savior. So, how did they speak about the risen Jesus, and how does that help to inform our mission? Well, look with me at verse 10. As Peter, before the hostile religious leaders, begins to explain his understanding of Jesus, he says, Then know this, you and all the people of Israel, it's by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified, but whom God raised from the dead, that this man stands before you healed. So, he connects resurrection with a great reversal. So, Peter, filled with the Spirit, records the truth that God overrides the decision of those leaders. The verdict that was placed on Jesus by those who crucified Him has been overridden through the resurrection. So, that while they wanted to heap shame on Jesus as a false Messiah, by God's design, He is honored. They meant nothing but death for Jesus, but He was righteous and didn't deserve to stay in the place of death, and so God raises Him to life again. While His enemies would call

Him a blasphemer, His Father said, this is my Son, and I love Him. Listen to Him. This idea of God reversing their verdict is a common theme, actually, as Peter and the apostles teach. So, we heard it at Pentecost. In verse 23, this man was handed over to you by God's deliberate plan and foreknowledge, and you, with the help of wicked men, put Him to death by nailing Him to the cross, but God raised Him from the dead. So, part of God's plan. And so, Peter stands before a variety of different crowds in the book of Acts, and he will say, I'm an eyewitness. I'm an eyewitness to the risen Lord Jesus. I'm an eyewitness to the fact that He was ascended into glory, and that speaks to the fact that God has a different verdict on Jesus than the religious leaders. We often say, don't we, that God's verdict on our lives is the one that matters, and that's true. We should live before the audience of one.

But here we need to understand, when it comes to the resurrection, it's God's verdict on Jesus is the one that matters. And of course, our response to that determines the verdict God has on our lives.

So, when they speak of resurrection, they often bring in this idea of reversal. Coupled with that, verse 11 helps us to see that resurrection is connected with the idea of necessity. Jesus is, quoting from Psalm 118, the stone you builders rejected, which has become the cornerstone. So, one of the wonderful things that Jesus helps His followers to understand is that as they read their Old Testament Scriptures, they will find foreshadowings of the person, the work, the ministry of Jesus, including the resurrection. They're taught by Jesus Himself to know that the cross is necessary and the resurrection is necessary to God's plan of salvation. So, Peter, as we've just heard in Acts chapter 2, can see God's hand in it. Listen to His language again. This man was handed over to you by God's deliberate plan and foreknowledge. Essential to salvation, that Jesus be handed over, that He be killed, and then be raised to life. It's anticipated in Psalm 16.

[11 : 44] And again, Peter quoted from that, you will not abandon me to the realm of the dead. You will not let your Holy One see decay. Now, whenever Peter hears the words of that Psalm, he understands that that truth is applied to the lips of Jesus. He is the Holy One who was not abandoned to the place of the dead. Indeed, it's unthinkable that the author of life should ever be permanently subjected to death, rather having gone into battle against sin and death and the devil. He was raised in victory.

So, the resurrection is reversal, and it's necessary. And then to go back to chapter 4 and verse 12, Peter wants to connect the resurrection with salvation. Because Jesus is risen, salvation is found in no one else. For there is no other name under heaven given to mankind by which we must be saved.

Acts' speeches from Peter, from Paul, often end with a call to repent. Why do they end with a call to repent? Because as they understand the truth of the resurrection, they understand that Jesus is the one who has overcome sin and death. There is forgiveness, there is victory in Him, there is peace with God, through faith in the risen Christ. They understand that He has been appointed by God as the end-time judge. And to hear the judgment of being declared righteous, you need to have faith in the one crucified and now risen.

And so, they emphasize that the resurrection has significance for salvation. Indeed, we didn't read it, but Acts chapter 4 verse 2, we read this, they were greatly disturbed, that's the opponents of the apostles, because the apostles were teaching the people, proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection of the dead. So, they're beginning even at this stage to make a connection. Jesus rose from the dead. If we have faith in, we too will rise from the dead, that where Jesus goes, we too will go. So, salvation then becomes tied up with the hope of a new heaven and a new earth for the people of God. So, the resurrection is crucial for the apostles as they teach, regardless of their context, friendly or otherwise. Now, how can all this thinking about the resurrection help the church on mission today? Well, to take a step back, we read three different scenes, but in each we see Peter publicly testifying that Jesus died and rose again. And I think we have in the book of Acts an encouragement to public faith, that part of our mission is to live our mission is to live out our faith before a watching world. Now, the context for them, often hostility, often opposition. Definitely, they were a tiny minority, both within Judaism and within the Roman Empire at this stage, but yet they publicly testified. What might that look like for us?

Allowing Jesus and his teaching to impact our daily lives? Certainly, he's Lord of all. Look like obedience to Jesus as Lord, being ready to bear the cost of that, that makes life difficult in our family setting, in our workplace, in our workplace, or in our place of education.

[15 : 39] As we see from Peter and others, taking risks with the help and the power of the Holy Spirit to communicate our faith to others when we have opportunity to love the local church as an expression of the kingdom of Jesus. So, we're encouraged to public faith.

I think this also encourages us to recognize, all this talk about the resurrection, to recognize the interest that there is today in the afterlife. What happens after we die? It's interesting to see that there's still a great interest. People are still asking those questions. Popular culture.

You've got TV shows like The Good Place or Russian Doll. You've got novels like The Lovely Bones. You've got so many stories that always sell well about people, you know, traveling into the light and going to heaven for a few minutes and then coming back. And they can always get on telly and they can always sell books. People are interested in the idea of the afterlife. And there was a survey recently done by King's College down in London called the World Values Study, looking at different countries and what different countries think about religious questions. It revealed that in the UK, 46% of people still say they believe in life after death. It seems fairly high. Interestingly, younger people are recognized to be more likely to believe in life after death, more likely to believe both in heaven and in hell. 16 to 24 year olds are far more likely to believe in heaven and hell than 60 year olds and 70 year olds, according to that survey. The survey director made the observation, it seems like those young people who are less attached to formal religion actually have a greater sense and need of, there must be more than this. There must be something bigger than this.

And so when we see it in our culture and we hear it in our surveys and we hear it in conversation, we need to talk about the resurrection as a crucial part of the whole gospel. You know, we can't stop with, you know, Jesus lived and Jesus died for our sins. To remind people about the resurrection, about the return of Christ, about the new heavens and the new earth and what that looks like for the believer. Because Christianity promises to meet so many deep longings that people have.

People love this earth. People love friendships and family and a love that lasts. Jesus promises it in the new heaven and the new earth.

[18 : 22] Jesus meets deep longings as people come to him by faith. The third thing that we see from Peter and the apostles throughout the book of Acts is a reminder again to take a step back, to read the Bible in a Jesus-centered way. We thought about that a little bit this morning.

You know, after teaching, after listening to Jesus, it becomes instinct for these believers, for these apostles to read their Old Testament and to see Christ on every page. Again, a plug for the Rooted Women's Bible Study. It's going to be a good time of seeing in those great stories of Ruth and Joseph themes that connect to Jesus and the gospel. Our mission is to help people to know our God, to help people to come to know Jesus. He is the great hero in the storyline of all of Scripture.

Jesus risen and exalted is the one that we proclaim. Andreas Kostenberger said this, The dynamic that drives the dynamic that drives the irresistible spread of the gospel in Acts is clearly the apostolic proclamation of the risen Christ. Nobody saw it coming that God's Messiah would die in shame and be raised in glory, but they proclaimed it, and the world was turned upside down, and it will always be the same. So that's the message of the risen Christ that we need to proclaim.

Now let's turn to Acts chapter 10 just for a few minutes to think about the movement of the risen Christ as the church goes on mission. So we're here in Acts chapter 10. Peter is at Cornelius' house.

It's one of these great moments in the book of Acts where the gospel jumps barriers, because Cornelius is a Roman soldier. He is a Gentile, would be regarded to an outsider as an enemy of the people of Israel. But we know that God is working in his heart. He's described in verse 2 of chapter 10 as a devout and God-fearing man along with his family. God is drawing him.

[20 : 52] And God works through two visions. Cornelius gets a vision. Go and send for this man Peter. Peter gets a vision while he's praying and is led to come to Cornelius' house. And when he arrives, what's his message about Jesus? Well, here that he stays on topic. He tells Cornelius, Jesus is God's message of good news. You know the message God sent to the people of Israel, announcing the good news of peace through Jesus Christ, who is Lord of all. He declares in verse 38, Jesus is God's anointed, anointed with the Holy Spirit and with power. And he declares that Jesus was raised by God. Verse 39 and 40, they killed him by hanging him on a cross, but God raised him from the dead on the third day. And after speaking about Jesus, Peter also wants to tell Cornelius something of himself. In verse 41, he makes the point that he saw Jesus. He's one of the eyewitnesses that Jesus appeared to. In verse 42, he makes the point that he was sent by Jesus. He commanded us to preach to the people. And he makes plain his message. All the prophets testify about him, that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name. Wherever Peter goes, he is sharing the same kind of message about the risen Lord Jesus as good news, bringing salvation and forgiveness of sins.

And as he goes, we see the Spirit is at work. The risen Lord Jesus who sends the Spirit, and the Spirit is then directing mission.

And listen to how Peter understands the mission movement. So again, in verse 34, we hear the language, I now realize how true it is that God does not show favoritism, but accepts from every nation the one who fears him and does what is right. This is not good news just for some people. This is good news for all people. Verse 36, you know the message God sent to the people of Israel, announcing the good news of peace through Jesus Christ, who is Lord of all. The supremacy of Christ and salvation through Christ for all.

All the prophets, verse 43, testify about him, that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name. Making the point in so many different ways that the risen and exalted Lord Jesus Christ seeks to gather his people from all nations. And he continues to do so as his people bring the gospel message.

And so as we think about our ongoing mission to make Jesus known here in Edinburgh, wherever we happen to find ourselves, again, some implications for us to consider, borrowed from the website of Overseas Missionary Fellowship, OMF, and some headings for us to consider. As we think about what will it look like for us to be involved in the mission of the risen Lord Jesus? And we begin, as we were thinking about this morning, with the idea of giving. One of the ways that we can be involved in mission is by supporting financially. So just to flag up, we made this decision, I guess, last year, maybe even two years ago as a deacon score, that every penny that comes into our offering on a Sunday evening will go to support mission. Mission in our church plant in Galaxias, the new church plant in Leith, and to support the Reannos working in Columbia. So whenever you give on a Sunday evening, that's where the money will go. Perhaps giving might look like supporting the Bible Society. Bible Society last year completed 181 translations of the Bible used by 723 million people, but they reckon there's still 1.15 billion people who still have no access to Scripture. So Bible Society, Bible translation work is a wonderful way to support the kingdom work as we think about how would God have me use my finances to invest in the kingdom of God. So we give. We're called, of course, to pray. We see it in the book of Acts, the early church so often praying together, praying for the glory of God, praying for the spread of the good news of salvation. We saw it in the Moravian mission movement, praying for the glory of Christ in the world as his mission field. So we have the chance to pray individually. We have the chance to pray as we come together, to pray knowing that everyone who believes in Jesus receives forgiveness of sins through his name, knowing that we have the best news that people really need to hear. And so we pray for our preaching here. We pray for every opportunity that we have to teach the Bible formally and informally.

[27:11] We pray for our plans for a new kids' club in our community, for evangelistic Bible studies for our students and young workers. We pray for the sake of ongoing mission. For some of us, perhaps we'll hear the call from God to go. Historians estimated that one in every 92 people connected to the Moravian movement they left home on mission. That's striking, isn't it? One of the things I've been praying in the last year or so is to pray that God would put it on the heart of one person or one family in our church to think about mission here or abroad. I include myself in that. We all need to be open, I think. David Platt puts it so well when he says, we are called to be ready for mission wherever we are. It could be in our families, in our neighborhood, in our office or our school, and we need to be open to wherever God leads.

Remember Isaiah, having seen the glory of God, ready to say, here am I, send me. As we see and appreciate the glory of the risen Lord Jesus, are we ready to say, here am I, send me. Maybe the last implication, OMF recognising the shift of people movements, they talk about welcome, reminding us of the mission field on our doorstep, reminding us of the opportunities that we have of nations, people from different nations coming to us. And many people who in their home countries wouldn't have easy access or any access to a church or to a Bible, to a place to ask questions or to explore Christianity.

So we have amazing opportunities, a chance to share the gospel, to make disciples, to send people home as believers of the Lord Jesus. And so again, that leads us to pray and seek opportunities, and maybe especially to pray for things like Connect on a Monday, where people from different nations gather, some of whom are Christians, many of whom are not.

So we see in the book of Acts, here are the apostles sent on this amazing mission for the risen Lord Jesus. And we understand that we have that same mission as the people of God.

Luke, as he writes his book of the Acts, he wants us to see that the rapid growth and spread of the gospel. The mission of the gospel, the mission of the church doesn't come because of finely tuned strategies. It comes because Jesus sends the Spirit, and the Spirit directs men and women, ordinary believers, as well as the apostles, to speak and act for the living God.

[30 : 10] And that's what God still wants to do, to equip us, to empower us, ordinary Christians, that we might make Jesus known. And that's good news. It's good news as we think about our mission.

It's good news as we think about our Monday morning. And where will we be? Where will our mission field be this week? Perhaps in the school? Perhaps on our street? Perhaps it'll be in the hospital? Or in our office? But we have that promise that Jesus will be there with us by His Spirit, giving us that wonderful privilege of representing Him, of serving Him, so that we might make it known that Jesus is the risen Savior of the world. Let's pray together briefly. Lord,