

World Wide Witness: The Mission Of The Church

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[0 : 00] But God raised him from the dead, and for many days he was seen by those who had travelled with him from Galilee to Jerusalem. They are now his witnesses to our people.

We tell you the good news. What God promised our fathers, he has fulfilled for us, their children, by raising up Jesus. As it is written in the second psalm, You are my son, today I have become your father.

The fact that God raised him from the dead never to decay, it is stated in these words, I will give you the holy and sure blessings promised to David. So it is stated elsewhere, you will not let your holy ones see decay.

For when David had served God's purpose in his own generation, he fell asleep. He was buried with his fathers, and his body decayed.

But the one whom God raised from the dead did not see decay. Therefore, my brothers, I want you to know that through Jesus the forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you.

[1 : 04] Through him everyone who believes is justified from everything you could not be justified from by the law of Moses. Take care that what the prophets have said does not happen to you.

Look, you scoffers, wonder and perish, for I am going to do something in your days that you would never believe, even if someone told you.

As Paul and Barnabas were leaving the synagogue, the people invited them to speak further about these things on the next Sabbath. When the congregation was dismissed, many of the Jews and devout converts to Judaism followed Paul and Barnabas, who talked with them and urged them to continue in the grace of God.

Thanks very much, Jonathan.

There is at the back an A4 sheet, which you may find helpful in understanding the big plan. This one here is entitled Progression of God's Mission.

[2 : 11] So the big sweep of Acts, and it helps you understand what's going on and some of the big themes. So there's copies of those at the back. You might want to take them to read at home.

Well, keep your Bibles open at Acts 13. We're going to dip into Luke as well, just very briefly.

But we're going to pray first and ask for God's help in this. Father, we thank you for this great book of Acts, this history of the early church, its beginnings, its growth, and its spread across the entire world.

But more than that, we thank you for the person of Jesus to whom it points to and tells us about.

And we pray that what we read and what we look at together would shape us, not as individuals, but it would shape us and transform us as a church and the way that we should be.

So please help us, we ask in Jesus' name. Amen. Well, I want to start by asking what is a very contentious but critical question.

[3 : 39] And if you come along on Wednesday nights, I'm sure this question will be debated at large. Here's the question. It's the title of the talk. What is the mission of the church?

You might think that's straightforward. What is the mission of the church? What would you answer to that question? Well, let me give you some possible answers.

The mission of the church is to grow God's kingdom, love God and love your neighbour. Is it to tell the gospel?

Or is it to serve the community? The mission of the church is to plant churches? Or feed the poor and fight injustice?

Or obey God's commands? What is the mission of the church? Well, before we try and answer that, let's define what we mean by mission.

[4 : 43] Surprisingly, mission as a noun, as in what is the mission, it doesn't appear in the Bible. But it does mean, when we talk about mission, it means being sent with a task.

So we could define it like this. I think it's on the screen there. Mission is the specific task or purpose the church is sent to accomplish.

That's our working definition for mission. So what is the task? What is the purpose for the church? Well, you might think of a missionary who goes overseas or you might think of a group of people who go on a short-term missions trip.

And when people do that, it could mean anything from teaching in a Bible school to personal evangelism, or it might mean going to a country where you're digging a well or starting a health clinic.

You see, there is a very popular view in the church today that the mission of the church is to feed the poor, fight injustice, and free the enslaved.

[5 : 55] Now, I want you to hear me clearly on this. While I say yes to all of these things and encourage and support those things, it is not the mission of the church.

They may help to facilitate the mission of the church. They may be in some ways a partner, but it is not the mission. Mission is not everything the church does or can do, but what the church is sent in the world to do.

So, have a flick back to Luke's Gospel, chapter 24. Luke's Gospel, you remember, is the prequel to Acts.

It was the first one that Luke wrote, and it's introducing us to who Jesus is, why he came, and after his resurrection, Luke records the last and final words that he gives to his followers.

Luke 24, verse 46. Jesus told them, this is what is written, that Christ will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, and repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem.

[7 : 21] You are witnesses of these things. Now, there's three things there. It says, the Christ will suffer, he will rise from the dead. Both of those have been fulfilled.

Both of those things have happened, but there's one outstanding thing that hasn't yet finished, and that is in verse 47, that repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem and working out from there.

An author, Kevin DeYoung, puts it like this. He says, mission is not everything we do in Jesus' name, nor is it everything we do in obedience to Jesus.

Mission is the task we are given to fulfil. It's what Jesus sends us into the world to do. So the mission of the church is not to sponsor a child.

It is not to work for famine relief. It is not to care for the environment. It is to witness about Jesus, his death, his resurrection, and our response to him.

[8 : 30] Of course, that doesn't mean we don't do those things. We do, and as a church, we encourage those things. However, by themselves, as we will see, they do not fulfil the mission that God has given.

Now, when we get to Acts, so you can go back to Acts again, when we get to Acts, we see those final words of Jesus being fulfilled through the book of Acts, being worked out.

In fact, the whole book of Acts is all about his people preaching the good news of Christ. And of course, as we go through Acts, there are examples, you'll know in chapter 2 and chapter 4, there's these great examples of social care and concern as the church sell their possessions, they sell their fields, they sell their other homes, and they give to those who are in need.

So there is a social care. But the primary underlying theme working its way through the whole book is this. The priority for the church until Jesus returns, a mission of which the community must never lose sight is to witness to Jesus to the ends of the earth.

And that's what we find happening when we get to this church in Antioch that we were introduced to last week in Acts chapter 13. Look what we see happening in verse 2. Here they were, they were worshipping the Lord and fasting, and the Holy Spirit said, Set apart from me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I've called them.

[10 : 08] So after they had fasted and prayed, they placed their hands on them and sent them off. So what are they sending them off to do? What's the work? What's the mission? Well, verse 5, when they arrived at Salamis, they proclaimed the word of God.

They are simply fulfilling the mission of the church. So what we want to do as we look at chapter 13, the verses that Jonathan read, is to look and see how we can keep the mission of God, the mission of the church.

And we do this in two ways. Firstly, we keep the message of Jesus central. Keep the message of Jesus central in all the work that we seek to do as a church.

So verse 13, from Pathos, so you remember that they'd gone down to the island of Cyprus. So we're told from Pathos, Paul and his companions sailed to Perga in Pamphylia, which was just on the edge of Turkey, back onto the mainland again, where John left them to return to Jerusalem. From Perga, they went on their way to Pisidian Antioch, which was about 100 miles inland, across mountains, beautiful scenery, to this place of Antioch, Pisidian Antioch.

[11 : 34] Now this isn't a tour, a holiday guide of where they went in the Mediterranean and Turkey. No, what this is telling us is that as they went from town to town, they were witnessing to Christ, as the text tells us.

Look at the rest of verse 14. So on the Sabbath, they entered the synagogue, like the local church, if you like, there and they sat down. And after reading from the law and the prophets, the synagogue rulers sent word to them, rumour had obviously spread about what they were doing, saying, Brothers, if you have a message of encouragement for the people, please speak.

So this word of encouragement that we read from verses 16 through to 41 is like the sermon that was going on. It was the exhortation, it was the message, it was an opportunity for them to open up the scriptures, the Bible, which they would have had the Old Testament, and from that they would have talked about Jesus, which is exactly what Paul goes on to do.

The message of Jesus was central. Now not everybody liked what he had to say. Look down at verse 44, we didn't read this, but let's read it together, verse 44.

So on the next Sabbath, a week later, almost the whole city had gathered to hear the word of the Lord. It's quite incredible, isn't it, that this rumour had spread, these people were talking about this Jesus, and they've all come to hear.

[13 : 01] But when the Jews saw the crowd, they were filled with jealousy and talked abusively against what Paul was saying. So not everybody liked what he had to say. But that was his mission.

Verse 46, Then Paul and Barnabas answered them boldly, We had to speak the word of God to you first. And since you reject it and do not consider yourselves worthy of eternal life, we now turn to the Gentiles, to all the other nations, people who are not Jews.

For this is what the Lord has commanded us. I have made you a light for the Gentiles that you may bring salvation to the ends of the earth.

God's mission, his work, his purpose, his plan is that the salvation of Christ would go to every people group, to every language group.

And so Paul and the church from which he was sent is driven by that same mission. Now increasingly, I'm discovering as I read articles and read different blogs on the internet that the definition of mission is beginning to expand, it's broadening.

[14 : 22] For some churches and mission organisations, the mission is about social justice, releasing people from poverty, increasing the opportunities of the weak.

and as I've said, that is all good stuff. We can support it, we should support it, we can be involved in it, but you know what, it doesn't enable people to receive salvation, it's not the message.

Let me put it bluntly, and I want to be very careful as I say this, but to make the point, a child with a full belly does not make them a child of God.

And a father released from slavery does not rescue them from hell. You see, when the opposition came to Paul and Barnabas that we read in verse 46, they could have kind of gone back to square one and redefined their mission.

Let's go do something else. But that's not going to save people. That's not going to rescue people. Tim Keller put it like this when he was talking about the primacy or the centrality of preaching the gospel.

[15 : 40] The gospel is central, he says, quote, not because the spiritual is better than the physical, but because the eternal is more important than the temporal.

We must be crystal clear on what the mission of the church is. So first, we are to keep the message of Jesus central.

Second, we are to keep Jesus the centre of our message. Keep Jesus the centre of our message. As Barnabas and Paul speak to these people, it's very clear that they're talking about Jesus. Now, as I was reading through that, and I hope it's the same for you, that's a real challenge. Because I find myself actually talking about a lot of other things. It's not wrong to talk about other things, but let me give you an example.

One of the questions when you meet new people after they get to know what your name is, they usually ask you, what do you do? And I'm always asked, what do you do? And usually it ends the conversation pretty quick or people want to go talk a bit more.

[16:53] But often when people ask me that, it develops into a conversation about the church or the kind of work that I do in the church. In other words, I tell people about church life, but I'm not actually talking to them about Jesus.

Or perhaps in the conversation, if it develops a bit more, I talk about the Bible, I say, well, one of the things I do is to help people understand the Bible and what it's about.

And I maybe talk about how reliable it is in that the Gospels that we read are actually trustworthy. They're true eyewitness accounts and they're not just made up. And I can talk all this wonderful information, but it's actually not talking about Jesus.

We need to talk about Jesus. And Paul does this in many ways here, but I've summarised it into three simple ways and I hope this is a helpful way of just recounting the whole message of Christ. First, Jesus is the promised Saviour. Look at verse 16. Or sorry, verse 17. It seems like as he starts into his spiel, this is just a big history lesson as he talks about the beginning of Israel.

[18:13] So in verse 17, he says, the God of the people of Israel chose our fathers, he made the people prosper during their stay in Egypt, and with mighty power he led them out of the country.

Verse 20. All of this took about 450 years. And then he begins to talk about a succession of great leaders and kings. So continue on in verse 20.

After this, God gave them judges until the time of Samuel the prophet. Then the people asked for a king and he gave them Saul. Verse 22. After removing Saul, he made David their king.

So what is this? Just history? What's going on? Well, no, there's a purpose to all of this. His purpose is to get to Jesus. Consistently, God had promised through the nation of Israel and through all their great leaders like Moses and Samuel and David and Saul that Jesus would come.

It's all part of his plan. So when we get to verse 23, what does he say? From this man, once he gets to David, from this man's descendants, God has brought to Israel the saviour, Jesus, as he promised.

[19:25] Now most people today, while they don't know a lot about him, are still familiar with Jesus. At best they may see him as a good moral teacher. He arrived on earth for a few years and, well, he died an unfortunate death.

But it's so much bigger and greater than that. We must show people that Jesus is God's promised saviour from eternity past, who has come into this world to renew broken lives and restore this broken world.

And he does it all through his death on the cross. Jesus didn't just appear out of nowhere. Jesus is God's planned solution to the devastation and destruction that we see all around us in the world and in people's lives.

He is a promised saviour, a rescuer, the one that everybody longs for and wants. So we need to talk about Jesus. The second thing we could sum up like this is that we talk about Jesus as the risen king.

Verse 26. No, verse 20, well, hang on. Yeah, 26 to 37. Most people, again, when we talk about Jesus, they accept that he lived on earth, that he came to earth for a while.

[20:51] They maybe recognise that he died, but where people have a real problem is that he rose again, that he's actually still alive. But we need to make sure that people understand that that's true, and Paul is concerned that people know that this is true.

So look at verse 29. When they carried out all that was written about him, they took him down from the tree, that's the cross, and they laid him in a tomb.

But God raised him from the dead, and for many days he was seen by those who travelled with him from Galilee to Jerusalem. They are now his witnesses to our people.

You couldn't have made this up. People saw him, touched him, heard him. They ate with the risen Jesus. Hundreds of people saw him. So you can't make it up.

And without the resurrection of Jesus, everything that he said in his life would prove to be empty. It would just be a lot of hot air. But if Jesus is risen from the dead, if he actually is alive, then his promise of renewal and restoration is true.

[22 : 01] Verse 32. We tell you the good news, what God promised our fathers. He has fulfilled for us their children by raising up Jesus.

Verse 36. David was a great king, a great leader.

We can read about him. But he ended up a dead, smelling, rotting corpse. Jesus, however, defeated death.

Therefore, he has power and authority over death. The resurrection proves, it guarantees the promise of eternal life. Everybody fears death.

Nobody likes the thought of one day having to die. Where do we go? What will happen? It's our enemy. But the resurrection guarantees the promise of eternal life.

[23 : 11] And if Jesus has risen, well then we can trust him with our life. We can trust him with our future. So we need to talk about Jesus.

Talking about the church, talking about the Bible, is not going to help people. Third, we could sum it up like this.

He talks about Jesus, the forgiving judge. And look at how Paul just keeps Jesus central the whole way through his talk. Verse 38. Therefore, my brothers, I want you to know that through Jesus, the forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you.

Through him, everyone who believes is justified from everything you could not be justified from by the law of Moses. Now we know we experience life every day.

You know the mess that people get themselves into, all because of our rebellion against God. God. But Jesus is full of grace and mercy and compassion and he's making it clear to us and to all people that he offers forgiveness.

[24 : 24] He provides a way for us, look at verse 39, to be justified. That is to be declared right before God. Not only to be declared right, but actually to be treated as right, to be treated like his own son.

this is what he does for us. Remember the nursery rhyme about Humpty Dumpty? Well, we're all a little bit like Humpty Dumpty.

We've all had a great big fall. And all our efforts and all our energies can never fix us. We can never be put back together again by our own efforts and trying our own different ways in life.

But Jesus is the one who has come to forgive, to put us back together, to make us a new creation, alive again in Christ.

But what if we refuse his forgiveness? Well, he makes it clear we face him as judge, verse 40. take care that what the prophets have said does not happen to you.

[25 : 40] Look, you scoffers, wonder and perish, for I am going to do something in your days that you would never believe, even if someone told you. This is a quote from the prophet Habakkuk.

And he's talking there about the people in the past and their refusal to repent and turn back to God. And God said, because of your continued refusal, my judgment is going to come.

And it's going to come via the nation of the Babylonians. And they're going to move into your land, they're going to destroy you, they're going to take you into captivity.

captivity. That's what's going to happen and it did happen. And what he's saying here is, he's making this as an example, he says, if you refuse this Jesus who has come to bring forgiveness, he says, well, Jesus one day is coming as judge.

But that judgment will be eternal. It won't be through another nation, it will be through his son, and it will be hell. So you see, we need to talk about Jesus, don't we?

[26 : 51] That's the reality of it. It's so easy for us to talk about something else or someone else. And we need to be careful that we do not lose the centre of our message.

And as I've said, increasingly many churches and organisations, well, they're kind of sidelining the message of Jesus because, well, it's not very PC today. Social justice and human rights, well, people get that, they understand that, so let's do that and let's talk about that.

And while they're all good things, ultimately, when we're speaking of eternity, it will help no one. Is God concerned about the poor? Is he concerned about justice?

Absolutely. The Bible is full of God's concern for the poor. But it's not the mission of the church. One church that is involved in a social justice issue that I was reading about has got it right.

They're involved in healing and rescuing those, particularly young girls who are caught up in sexual exploitation and human trafficking of young children.

[28 : 11] And here's a quote from one of their leaders which highlights what is central. Now bear in mind they do an awful lot of work of rescuing, of taking them out of these places, literally physically rescuing them out of it.

But listen to his quote and where the emphasis is put. This is what he says, we recognise that if we rescued everyone involved in sexual exploitation today, millions and millions and millions would be there to take their place tomorrow.

Because at the root of sexual exploitation is the demand for sex from the sinful desires of people. I know we need awareness campaigns and justice and better laws to prosecute, but none of them will change people permanently.

The desires of people's hearts need to change. What we need is the gospel of Jesus Christ. The reality that Jesus died for our sins so that we can be alive with God.

It's Jesus who has and who will continue to change the hearts of people. It's Jesus who changes abusers into protectors, addicts into free people, traffickers into rescuers.

[29 : 30] To really change exploitation, we need more than governments and policy. We need Jesus to change hearts. For when the gospel changes the hearts of people, that changes everything.

We need to keep the message of Jesus central. And when we keep the message of Jesus central, and when Jesus is the centre of our message, lives are changed and hearts are transformed.

Look at verse 48. When the Gentiles heard this, they were glad and honoured the word of the Lord, and all who were appointed for eternal life believed.

And the word of the Lord spread through the whole region. You see, if we make God's mission the mission of the church, we will begin to see an end of poverty and injustice and slavery, because attitudes will be changed.

And if we grasp that ultimately we're sent into the world with the good news of the gospel, then we will see an end to exploitation and trafficking and sweatshops.

[30 : 47] In their place, we will see new communities of people, churches, people who love Jesus and who love others, all living under the rule of Christ, living God's way in his world.

May God give us together as a church his grace to live out his mission in this church and in the world today.

Let's pray. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Father, we thank you for Jesus. We thank you that he is our promised saviour, that he is our risen king, our forgiving judge.

Thank you for all that we have because of him, the work he has done in our lives. God, we pray that we would be people who keep Jesus central to our lives, to our families, to our marriages, to our church and the mission that we are involved in.

[32 : 10] And as we go around this world, as we meet people, help us to talk about Jesus. Jesus. And we ask for your help in doing this, for his honour, for his glory, for the saving of many, many people.

In Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Amen. So we're going to sing a song that I hope reflects some of what we've been thinking through.

Could you flick on to the next slide there? I think that's... No, one more.

There we are. By faith the church... This is the second verse down. By faith the church was called to go in the power of the spirit to the lost, to deliver captives and to preach good news in every corner of the earth.

Let's stand together as we encourage one another in our calling. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.