

# World and Mission

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[ 0 : 00 ] Great to be with you once again and to speak to you while George is traveling, I believe, for this week and next weekend as well.

It is always a privilege to open up God's Word together today. Today I'll begin the first of two, a two-part series, I guess, on mission, and I'll say a bit more about what the plan will be. But these are teachings leaning into sermon, okay? So I hope we'll be encouraged together. In 1 Peter 2.10 we heard these words, Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people. Once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy. So why don't we pray before we come to Scripture together.

Father, we ask that by your Spirit you'd come, make us teachable, give us ears to hear, give us hearts to receive.

[ 1 : 13 ] We trust that you are the God of the nations. We glory in that and we pray that we would be encouraged today as we open up Scripture together.

This we ask in Jesus' name. Amen. Brothers and sisters, if we're specifically a people, and specifically God's people, given that whether we're Jews or Gentiles, we've been given the same ears to hear his voice, shown the same mercy, and called together into one fellowship.

If that's our basic identity, well, what's our mission in the world? Throughout history, we've heard different answers to that question.

Going way back, some have said, well, the church's main task is to see to it that the nations are Christianized. That is, the church should see to it that everyone, from kings right down to the common peasant, should accept baptism and the rest of the rites of the church by force, if need be. Others have said, no, that's not our job. Our job is not to try to convert people to other faiths, to Christianity, because they have their own culturally appropriate ways of reaching God.

[ 2 : 38 ] So we should just stick to the basics of justice and caring for the poor and the needy, and so forth. Still others have said, well, we think the church's main task in the world is to extend the best of our Western Christian civilization through education, through development, through the arts, through good government, and so forth.

So where do we turn for an answer? History, of course, has a lot to teach us, often by way of showing us all the problems that come when we pursue something good but the wrong way. Or settle for something less than what God commands. So we have to turn to Scripture so we can make sense of all the opinions we hear on the matter and learn what God has to say about it. So I'll be speaking about missions both today and next Sunday, and my hope is that we'll have a greater clarity about the subject, but above all that we'll be encouraged and challenged in the task that's before us.

To introduce both talks, I'd like to reflect briefly on two things. So this serves to introduce both, so this will encourage you to make sure to come back next Sunday because I'll have already introduced the main theme.

[ 4 : 02 ] What Jesus teaches about missions and what, according to Scripture, is the final purpose of mission. So first, what does Jesus say about mission?

I think it's really important that we grasp at the very beginning how very central mission is, not only to God's nature and purpose, but to ours as his people.

What do I mean? Well, consider John 20, 21, where Jesus says, As the Father has sent me. If you have your Bibles handy, have a look with me at that passage.

Fundamentally, what we see is that mission belongs to the Father. It was his work to send the Son into the world. And Paul gives us the reason for that sending when he says in 2 Corinthians 5, 19, that God was in Christ doing what?

Reconciling the world to himself, not counting people's sins against them. And Jesus continues. He says, As the Father has sent me, even so I'm sending you.

[ 5 : 14 ] And so note, not only what Jesus says here, but the context, the when, of when he says it. God has just raised him from the dead.

And now he appears to his disciples there as a group. And first, he comforts them. He says, Peace be with you. And second, he teaches them.

He instructs them. And he bears witness to what the Father has done. And he declares what he is now ready to do. And then thirdly, he commissions them.

He says, Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they're forgiven them. And if you withhold forgiveness from any, it is withheld. And I think that's precisely why Paul, after saying what God accomplished through Jesus, can add this.

He can say, God has entrusted to us the message of reconciliation. The second thing I think we want to have clear is the final purpose or end of mission.

[ 6 : 22 ] It's of course very true that God's will is to call together a people to be his own and to save them through Jesus. But his final purpose in doing that and in willing that is his glory.

George pointed to this when he said two weeks ago that God wants more people to glorify him. It's his will to see his glory restored over all the earth as we read in Psalm 57.

The glory theme is strong in Israel's book of common prayer, the Psalms. And particularly Psalm 67 which we've read responsibly already.

And that Psalm has a mission logic, if you like, that runs basically like this. First, we ask God to bless us and to shine his face, shine on us.

Why? Well, so that his will and his saving power will be known among all nations. And from there, we pray for the nations.

[ 7 : 29 ] We pray that the nations may be glad and that all people everywhere will praise God. And then, why? Why do we pray that? Well, here's the warrant. Because we long for all the ends of the earth to fear him.

See the logic there? God's favor towards us serves to bring the nations to him. And then as the nations come to him, the ultimate end of mission is clear.

The holy fear of the Lord is restored. God is glorified. Habakkuk says, Earth shall be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord as the waters cover the sea.

So thanks for bearing with me through this introduction. There's still a bit more. So let's come back to the question, what is the church's mission in the world? And I think we have to clarify this too, don't we?

Because it might seem that the message of reconciliation is just given to a few. Initially there, the disciples, who would be Jesus' sent ones, his apostles, and from there, maybe to ordained ministers and professional missionaries.

[ 8 : 40 ] And of course, Jesus does say, so I am sending you specifically to his disciples. But this morning, we have also heard in 1 Peter 2 something about our identity as a church.

Let me ask you, when you put the words mission and church side by side, how do you typically relate those two?

Well, I think what we typically do is we think of mission as a kind of department or subdivision of church, logically. We have committees, don't we?

We have, I don't know, finance, worship, Christian education, hospitality, and of course, missions. But, while this is fine organizationally for the structure of our church as an institution, it can be misleading in a way because it gives a picture of church as something that's pretty well fixed somewhere so that it has a headquarters where it does one set of things.

One set of things happens at headquarters and then it has outposts like in the military. It has missions or mission stations out there where another sort of set of things happens.

[ 10 : 08 ] That is, if the church has budgeted for them, right? You see what I'm getting at? I think we have to turn this on its head and think of the church itself in missionary terms.

As Tim Keller says, the church exists to be a mission. That means everything. Our worship, our teaching, our hospitality, our seminaries, all of them have to be thought through in relation to our basic missionary identity.

as I've pondered that truth that mission is central to our identity, I've come to this conclusion. The church is perpetually on the go.

In other words, a little bit like my grandson, Timmy, who's perpetually on the go when I look after him most mornings of the week and he keeps me fit.

In other words, being sent is not an occasional activity of the church. This means that until Jesus comes again, we never have the luxury, if I can put it this way, of arriving anyplace.

[ 11 : 21 ] As if having done our missionary work, well, we could just sort of say, okay, well, that's done and now we can turn our attention to other things. We're always in the business of going out in one way or another.

yes, we do seek to be salt and light where God has placed us, but, well, to that extent, we're fixed, if you like, in one place and you can locate us on the map here every Sunday.

But we never settle so permanently so that all that's left to do is hatch and match and dispatch the faithful in a kind of chaplaincy mode of thinking of church.

Nothing against chaplains, right? But that can have a way of taking church for granted, right? And so we have church, this steady, stable institution with its chaplains and its parishes and so on and so forth.

Sometimes our going out is literal as when we commission workers to go somewhere else on our behalf and they really, truly go out on our behalf or because God has allowed us to be scattered from our homeland as many Christians find themselves in history.

[ 12 : 34 ] At other times, the going out is more of an attitude or inward habit, if you like, in the sense of going out of our comfort zone so that we're ready to meet others where they are for the sake of the gospel.

And it's on this basis that I think we can say that we're a missionary people. Well, so you ask, well, what about those we actually ordinarily refer to as missionaries? Well, I'd like to suggest that, well, we can continue calling them that and it doesn't present a special problem, but we have to know what we mean.

What we mean is that they are, if you like, special field workers. That's about the best I can come up with right now, special field workers. And we support a number of them here at Messiah.

And we do this and we pray for them regularly and specially because we recognize the particular nature of their work. Until I was 18, I lived in a special field where I was born, Mexico, where my parents served for close to 50 years with an evangelistic organization you may have heard of called Operation Mobilization, maybe I've mentioned it.

We were blessed to know that Christians in the U.S. and Canada and other places were supporting us with their prayers and with their finances. And what made that field work special or extraordinary?

[ 14 : 07 ] Now, I don't recall thinking of my own identity as a mish kid, as a hardship, because we really were given a lot and we were blessed with all kinds of opportunities.

But as a family, we had left behind certain things, like regular contact with relatives, back then it was not easy to go up to the states to visit relatives.

We did it maybe once a year, maybe not. And all the things you miss from your native culture. But this wouldn't be the real reason that the field work was special.

What made it special were two things. First, evangelistic outreach in Mexico was based on a particular need that had been identified. that was the need to preach the message of the gospel in a land whose form of religion had in many ways obscured the gospel itself.

For instance, when my dad first went from village to village back in 1960 and following, giving out gospels of John and preaching in the town squares, he would often find himself chased out of the town by two people, the mayor and the village priest.

[ 15 : 28 ] Think about that. Pre-Vatican II, the people didn't really have a chance to read the scriptures for themselves, so dad was doing something very counter cultural in handing out gospels of John in the village town squares.

And to this day, the dominant form of religion in Mexico remains a kind of blend blend of medieval Christianity with a host of pagan customs, offering little hope to its adherents.

And I just should add a footnote here. This fact should alert us to the way we sometimes do. Don't allow the gospel to be distinguished from our own culture and how much our own culture impacts the way we think of Christianity.

A second reason why the field work in Mexico was special was that it served as a constant reminder that mission is a global reality. The message was churches send out field workers.

And the lesson for us all, whether we're going or we're sending in that sense, is that we are a global people. We're part of a global fellowship. I'm going to speak about that more next time.

[16:43] My basic point is this. While it's really important that we learn to identify special fields, maybe sometimes we get it right, sometimes we get it wrong, but we have to learn to identify special fields, and then send and support people to work in those fields, it's still true that we're all called as God's people to missionary work.

The church is apostolic, both because it's founded on the authoritative teachings of the apostles, right, and the prophets, but it's apostolic also because we're an apostolic people.

We're sent as a people. So in the remainder of this talk, I want to focus on the missionary task where we happen to find ourselves. So we'll call it mission among the Gentiles.

We could say pagans if you like, the way some translations render 1 Peter 2.12. And then next Sunday with a couple of lessons from the book of Acts, we'll look specifically at how local and global are to be thought together as we think about the missionary task.

So turn with me back to that passage in 1 Peter 2. We'll go through it. We'll see, I think, and I trust that the missionary task involves three habits, and we'll start with the first part, which is verses 9 and 10.

[18:07] But you're a chosen race, as we read, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God's own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.

Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people. Once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy. So what's the habit that we're called to here?

Well, it's proclamation. And this, I think, this emphasis here reminds us how important and how central proclamation is, and how much it has a logical priority, how much testimony, giving and bearing witness, has a logical priority over any other missionary habit we may think of.

Certainly our testimony will be given expression in many different ways, but it will always have a propositional dimension. It will always have content, rational content.

The fact is, there are truth claims that are embedded in the way we behave, and in the way we worship, and in the way we serve. And these will be verbally declared as God gives the opportunity to declare them.

[19:28] And that's why if you read further down in chapter 3, Peter says in that often quoted verse, speaking of the apologetic ministry, be ready to give an answer, an apologia, for the hope that you have.

Be ready to speak. Are we ready to speak as a people? Are we ready in our day-to-day encounters? Are we ready to give a word about the hope we have?

So what are the excellencies that we're called to speak about? Well, some translations say virtues, and others say praises. And I think what we're basically declaring are God's marvelous qualities and his marvelous deeds, his mighty deeds.

They're marvelous if you look back in chapter 1 because he's done, he has done the marvelous work of causing us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.

God's marvelous God's marvelous Well, and in doing that work in history and Christianity, the gospel is always about what God has done in history. And in giving us, he's given us, he's worked in us in history and in us giving us a new identity.

[20:51] He's quite literally united us to Jesus. And by adoption, he's drawn us into Jesus' work as prophet, as priest, as king.

And by his spirit working in us, we're what Peter says, a royal priesthood called to something, called to proclaim his excellencies.

That's what we do as a prophetic people as well, sharing in Christ's threefold office. And to this, to the first hearers of this message, whether Jew or Gentile, and we have reason to believe that these scattered congregations were made up of both believing Jews and Gentiles in Asia Minor, this was a very, this was very encouraging news.

If they were worried about their displacement, about their exile, they were reminded that Jesus himself was rejected. As Hebrews says, he suffered outside the city gates.

And they had, they had this truth proclaimed to them that Jesus was now the cornerstone of a new and everlasting temple.

[ 22 : 14 ] And they could, they could be encouraged by this. And why is it so important that we learn to acknowledge the priority of proclamation today? Well, apart from the fact that scripture gives a natural priority to the, to it as the ordinary means that God uses to soften hearts and to bring new life, I think the short answer is that claims that certain things are true for everyone, claims that certain things are true for everyone, are automatically suspect in our day.

To say publicly, God has spoken. He's made us male and female. That Jesus rose bodily from the grave.

Well, these things make people uncomfortable, positively uncomfortable. Statements like these are taken, assumed to be some kind of power grab or something.

But we're still called to utter them as clearly as we can and as humbly as we can, as chapter 3, verse 15 reminds us. And we do this trusting that the power belongs to God and not to our learning or to our eloquence or anything of the sort.

Now, in our daily lives, as we go about ordinary things, proclamation doesn't come easy. As even one of my heroes, John Stott admitted, he tells of how he was once on a train in Wales in one of those compartments where you share, some of you probably traveled in those compartments in Europe where you share this cabin with one or two other passengers.

[ 24 : 03 ] Well, as it happened, his traveling companion that time was getting ready to shave. He had his shaving kit out and everything and he accidentally dropped it.

Well, Stott recalls that this man vented his anger by taking the name of Christ in vain. And Stott goes on, and I'll just quote from his little book, *Our Guilty Silence*.

He says, I said nothing. Indeed, I was sorely tempted to remain silent. The usual plausible excuses came crowding into my head.

It's none of your business. He'll only laugh at you. But the previous evening I had preached in church from Ephesians 4, 26 and 27.

Be angry, but do not sin. I had spoken about righteous indignation and the facade of sweet reasonableness which often conceals our moral cowardice and compromise.

[ 25 : 07 ] An inner struggle followed as I argued with myself and prayed. And not until 10 or 15 minutes later did I find the courage to speak.

Although his immediate reaction was unfavorable, I was soon able to witness to the Christ he had blasphemed and to give him an evangelistic booklet.

From proclamation we turn to a second habit. So in verses 11 and 12 we read this. Beloved, I urge you as sojourners and exiles to abstain from the passions of the flesh which wage war against your soul.

Keep your conduct among the Gentiles honorable so that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation.

The second habit of a missionary people, abstention. From what? Abstention as in stay away from fleshly lusts.

[ 26 : 20 ] The reasons are spelled out. They're all encapsulated here. We're exiles and pilgrims and sexual impurity basically obstructs our way to the promised land.

Most importantly, it's by nature soul destroying. And for instance, today we're all too familiar with the way the lies of pornography rewire the brain, if you like, knocking us out, flat out spiritually.

And so Peter, with this sort of thing in mind, calls the first century Christians to let their behavior among the pagans be honorable and blameless.

They were the atheists of the day, not worshiping according to pagan custom. So they would have been accused of all kinds of wrongdoing and of not going along with established custom.

But if they acted honestly, with integrity, and treated others with respect, they could trust that these good works would bear fruit in God's time on the day of his visitation.

[ 27 : 31 ] Here Peter echoes Jesus' words in Matthew 5.16. Let your light shine before others that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven. Now the hope that was there in Peter was that godly conduct would be itself a form of testimony, even if it were received for a time as falsehood.

Because a day of visitation would come. And what's that day? Well, God, either in Jesus' coming, at the end of time as we know it, in any case, God would bring things to a crisis point, as one commentary puts it.

Shining light on the real nature of things so that their hearts might change and give him glory even, the text says. For what?

Well, for the work he was doing all along in changing people's lives so that they could truly live a godly life. Now why is godly behavior so crucial for mission here where we find ourselves today?

Well, the reasons are basically the same as in the first century. The Bible's guidelines for sexual purity are taken to be plain silly at best and at worst evil.

[ 28 : 55 ] But if we give in and we pretend that God's standards are of little consequence, well, what sort of witness will we have made or given according to the hope that we have and according to the new life God has given us?

Let me illustrate. There's a denomination in the U.S. and Canada, well-known here in Canada, that this past summer took a very clear counter-cultural stand on what counts as sexual impurity.

Before its councils was a question. Given widespread acceptance of sexual intimacy outside the bonds of marriage between one man and one woman, in this area, the people were asked to consider, can we agree to disagree on this or must we consider it part of our essential doctrine?

A strong majority said that it was the latter. Its sexual purity is part of our core doctrine. Ultimately, the church pointed to its catechism, happens to be the Heidelberg Catechism, and said that its condemnation, the condemnation of unchastity in that catechism, includes adultery, premarital sex, extramarital sex, polyamory, pornography, homosexual sex.

On that basis, the synod declared that the church must warn its members that those who refuse to repent of these sins, as well as of idolatry, greed, and other such sins, will not inherit the kingdom of God.

[ 30 : 37 ] Now, just under a third of the denomination's delegates were unhappy with this outcome. But what's at stake, ultimately? From what we've seen in 1 Peter 2, what's at stake is the church's very identity as a forgiven, redeemed people set apart by God.

I think this has to be front and center. What's at stake is our very identity as a redeemed, forgiven people who once walked in darkness, but to whom God has shown mercy.

What's at stake is the church's soul as a band of exiles. What's at stake is the church's witness as it has yet one more opportunity to declare that God's standards are actually true and lovely, no matter how much the world might say that they are hateful and unappealing.

So let's move to the third part of our passage. Verses 13 to 16. Be subject for the Lord's sake to every human institution, whether it be to the emperor as supreme or to governors as sent by him to punish those who do evil and to praise those who do good.

For this is the will of God, that by doing good you should put to silence the ignorance of foolish people. Live as people who are free, not using your freedom as a cover-up for evil, but living as servants of God.

[ 32 : 17 ] In each of these passages, we see how much there's an identity of who we are in Christ and what follows from that. So from proclamation and abstention, we come to submission as a third habit of a missionary people, according to Peter.

We can look at this one briefly because the missionary significance is the same as with abstinence.

To do what is right in this area can serve as a form of testimony, a testimony that in this case silences those who accuse believers of doing wrong, of being insubordinate.

When Peter says, that's why Peter says there at the end, don't use your freedom as a cover-up for evil. He's referring to the fact that some of us will be quite tempted, wouldn't we, with our Christian freedom basically to disregard, to not acknowledge human authority and its legitimacy.

We'd become anarchists, as I well remember from Tolstoy in my Russian literature reading days where Tolstoy decided he would teach a form of anarchism.

But as a habit, it's worth considering on its own because submission reflects a third aspect of our identity as God's people. As a royal priesthood, we have truths to proclaim.

[ 33 : 44 ] Here's why I said our identity issues in a practice. As a royal priesthood, we preach. As strangers and sojourners, we abstain from certain things.

And now as servants of God, we are called to submit precisely because we're servants of God. And we submit to human authorities for the Lord's sake, in other words, because God has willed it for us in this life.

Now this doesn't rule out civil disobedience when we find that the laws of the land are unjust, but the principle remains. We submit to the authorities as unto God because we trust, ultimately, that

he's the one that's in charge.

He's the one who bends history to his will. He's the one who, as I've heard George say or write, who takes the messiness, right, and writes straight lines with, writes straight with crooked lines.

In our own day, the temptation to be disrespectful to our elected leaders can be very strong, particularly when they seem deaf to the concerns of ordinary people.

[ 34 : 55 ] We all know what I'm referring to from the last winter. But how easy is it to pray for those in authority as we're taught in Scripture while standing beside certain signs that became prominent during that movement?

And how does a visible endorsement of such signs impact our Christian witness? I know one of my grandsons was asking me, well, what are those signs, Granddad?

What signs are you talking about? I said, well, they were very rude signs, Aidan. We shouldn't stand by those signs. And he said, what did they say? And I said, well, just nasty stuff.

And he interpreted it in his own way. But the question is, what is our witness when we publicly endorse this kind of disrespect for leaders whose principles we might disagree, whose ideas we may disagree with profoundly, but that we ultimately disrespect them?

How can we pray for them? So let me conclude by bringing us back to where we started. I mentioned some of the main ways that the church in history has thought about mission.

[ 36 : 08 ] So just to put it in other terms, there was, if you like, the medieval, let's make converts model using force. And I could give you stories about that from my own Latin American understanding.

But there's also the pluralist, let's make friends model since our job would not be to preach Christ to others, but to work together for the common good.

And then there's the enlightenment, let's make good citizens model, which calls on the church to extend Western civilization. But Jesus gives us another set of marching orders, doesn't he?

He says, go and make disciples. What does that involve? Well, I hope it's clear to us this morning that it involves our whole lives because there's no room for what Lewis talked about, Christianity and-ism, if you like.

Here where the good news of Jesus, Christianity and, where the good news of Jesus is kind of collapsed into conquest. The good news is collapsed into social projects as good and worthy as they may be, but still the gospel is kind of collapsed into them as though they meant the same thing.

[ 37 : 26 ] The gospel is collapsed into building a civilization of one sort or another. We're talking about a basic plan of disciple making that involves us really fundamentally in looking up to see what God is doing, what he's doing in changing hearts the way he's changed ours through our prayer, through our witness, so that we have the privilege of baptizing people and of teaching them to obey all that Jesus commands.

And it involves trusting that whatever success we have is because of his power, because he's promised to be with us by his spirit until the end of the age.

Finally, you say, well, that task sounds really, really hard. It sounds overwhelming. The needs are so great. Opposition to God's ways is so strong. There seems to be indifference everywhere.

So let me just close with this recollection from a moment I remember from our Stella and I had three years in India and a moment where we were visiting our old friends from Regent College and Ivan and Sheila Satya Vrata.

They live in Calcutta. And he was preaching in his church in the Assembly of God Church there. And I don't remember the sermon topic because it's been a while now.

[ 38 : 53 ] It's been more than 10 years. But I do remember this very vividly. At one point, he was making reference to the overwhelming needs in his city. And he looked up and he prayed and he said, Lord, we have a problem.

Just like that. And then he immediately added, but I'm available. Please use me. And I think that that has stayed with me as the proper attitude to acknowledge that God is sovereign.

He's in charge. He knows how he's working and in which way in time, in our own times. And he is eager to use us as his instruments wherever we, wherever he happens to place us.

So why don't we pray in closing? Dear Lord, as with my friend Ivan in India, we acknowledge the need is overwhelming and we just ask that you would help us to be attentive to your care, your concern for the world around us, even where we are.

And we ask that you would draw us more closely to Jesus in our walk with him. Make us more attentive to your word and draw us into even greater fellowship with one another so that the world may know that you are king.

[ 40 : 31 ] As we ask in Jesus' name. Amen. Thank you.