

Reclaiming The Mission of Christmas

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[0 : 00] Well, I have a shopping theory. There are two basic kinds of shoppers. There are the grazer shoppers. These are the folks that when they shop, they go from aisle to aisle, basically grazing as they shop, kind of looking at different racks and imagining who this would look good on and maybe accessorizing all the while.

And I am prone to graze shop when I enter into a chainsaw shop. I look at the different engine displacements and the different sizes of these chainsaws and then I start accessorizing and thinking about the leather chaps I can be wearing and the helmet with the kind of come down face protecting on it.

I didn't, man, I just graze in a chainsaw shop for a good half hour to an hour. And then there are the missional shoppers.

These are the folks that before they leave their house, they already know what they're going to purchase. They arrive and they are on a mission. They have a singularity of focus.

I tend to be on the missional side of shopping myself. And so if my wife Jenny and I are driving to Menards in my pickup truck, I tend to have an already sense of what I need to purchase.

[1 : 23] I have a layout of Menards in my mind. I know I need to hit plumbing and then I hit windows and then the candy aisle and then I'm out. And if I pull up and Jenny says something to the extent of, Mike, can we do this in about 12 minutes?

I rise to that. I'm like, oh, we'll have seven minutes to spare. I will sprint because I'm on a mission. When we talk about mission, we're talking about a singularity of focus.

And our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, he is on a mission. Christmas season has gone.

Our Christmas tree is lying horizontal in the Christmas tree graveyard in Lincoln Park right now. But the incarnate Christ, he remains.

He's risen. He's reigning. And he's carrying out his mission through his church to spread the joy of the gospel to the nations.

[2 : 29] And so this morning, what I want to convince you of is that not only is the risen incarnate Christ on mission, he's called you to be a part of his mission too.

He's called you to be on mission with him to bring the joy of salvation to the nations. Christmas has everything to do with God's mission to save sinners from their sins.

So this morning, we're going to return to that classic Christmas passage in Luke chapter 2, where the angel declares to the shepherds the good news that a Savior has been born.

And what I want to help you to see this morning is that this angel came announcing the good news, that there was great joy.

It was a grand task for the peoples. And then we're going to wrap up tonight or this morning by talking about the God promise. So four moves this morning, if you want to follow me, the good news, which is the message of the mission, the great joy, which is the delight of the mission, the grand task, which is the scope of the mission.

[3 : 46] And then we're going to close by looking at the God promise, God's power for the mission. So Christ is on a mission, the risen incarnate Christ, and he's called us to be a part of it.

So let me just read Luke chapter 2, verses 10 and 11, just to remind you. And the angel said to them, fear not, for behold, I bring you good news, good news of great joy that will be for all the people.

For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. The good news. This angel came to the shepherds in the fields with a verbal announcement.

The mission, the message of the mission is proclamational. We declare it. We announce it.

And the angel of the Lord in chapter 2 of Luke, verses 10 and 11, he comes proclaiming Christ. A Savior has been born that day in the city of David.

[4 : 58] So he's a descendant of David. He is the Christ. He is the Lord, God incarnate. And so what we see happening in Luke chapter 2 is that Luke begins his gospel with the announcement, the angelic announcement of the birth of the Christ.

That's good news. But it's not the capital G, capital N good news. The good news of the birth is part of the capital G, capital N good news of the gospel.

If you flip in your Bibles to the end of the gospel of Luke to Luke 24, I want you to see the rest of the good news.

And as you're flipping your pages to Luke 24, let me just remind you that right now you're fast forwarding through the life of Jesus. You're fast forwarding through his teaching, his healing, his casting out demons, his raising people from the dead.

And as you're getting to the end of the gospel of Luke, you are fast forwarding through his crucifixion. The first Good Friday, when the Lord Jesus Christ hung on a cross.

[6 : 11] And at the ninth hour, the curtain in the temple was torn in two from top to bottom. And Luke records that immediately after that happened, Jesus says, Father, into your hands I commit my spirit.

Here's why I'm telling you this. That's good news. It's good news. Something happened when Jesus was on the cross. Something happened that shows up in the temple.

Something happens when he gives up his spirit. Something happened right there. And so, as we move forward, Jesus is buried in the tomb of Joseph of Arimathea.

And we are fast forwarding into Luke 24, where early in Luke 24, it's the first, it's the resurrection day. Early that morning, Jesus is raised from the dead.

The tomb is empty. And what we see happening throughout 24, starting in verse 36, is that the risen Christ Jesus shows up in Jerusalem, standing in the midst of his disciples in the upper room.

[7 : 19] And they're shocked. They thought he was dead and gone. But here he is standing before them. And he convinces them.

He seeks to convince them that it's really him raised bodily, incarnate from the dead.

Verse 39, he urges them to touch him. He shows them his hands and his feet. The very marks of the sacrifice on the cross.

He, in verse 41, asks them for something to eat. And they give him some broiled fish, and he eats it. What Luke is making plain is that Jesus, raised from the dead, remains incarnate.

And then what we see happening in Luke 24 is that the risen incarnate Christ tells his disciples in verse 44, if you pick up there with me, he says, These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you.

[8 : 28] These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you. Here's what Jesus is saying. That everything that just happened, everything that you witnessed, my suffering, my crucifixion, and now my resurrection, everything that you have seen is what I was telling you about before we got to Jerusalem.

It's the very things I was foretelling. Now, if you remember from our study of the book of Matthew, three times Jesus tells his disciples before they get to Jerusalem that when they get there, he's going to be handed over, he's going to be killed, and he's going to be raised from the dead.

And so what Jesus is saying here is that, Hey, what I told you would happen has happened. And in verse 44, at the latter half, he says, That everything written about me in the law of Moses and the prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled.

My suffering, my crucifixion, my resurrection, it's all fulfillment of the law and the prophets and the Psalms.

The Old Testament is fulfilled in its anticipation in me. What we're talking about here is the heart of the gospel. The essential message of the mission.

[9 : 49] That not only did God take on flesh, but this same God suffered. This same God was crucified.

This same God was raised from the dead. And so when the apostle Paul talks about this message in 1 Corinthians 15, do you know what he calls it? He says, This is the matter of first importance. Christ, who he is and what he's done, is of first importance. It's all about Jesus. It's all about who he is, God incarnate and what he's done.

Suffered, crucified, raised. This is good news. This is full good news.

Jesus had to take on flesh in order to suffer, in order to be crucified, and in order to be raised from the dead. Now maybe you're asking yourself a question like this.

[10:58] How is God incarnate dying on a cross good news? I mean, seriously, birth announcements, that's good news. I get that. But an obituary, the news of someone's death, that doesn't sound like good news.

Something happened. Jesus' death accomplished something. That makes it good news. Now some hear this and they may think, Well, this sounds all made up.

Or they hear this and they start thinking, This is some kind of psychological crutch. Or others hear this and say, The raising of a dead man? That's scientifically impossible. But if you are in the room this morning, And you personally are experiencing the real guilt over past sin.

If you personally know firsthand the shame over past sin. And if you personally find yourself struggling with the real fear.

What does this mean for me when I die? I've done this. What does God think about that? And what does that mean for my eternity? If you find yourself there.

[12:13] Remember this news of Jesus, The incarnate God suffering, Crucified and raised. This is good news for you.

Jesus, our Emmanuel, Didn't die accidentally on the cross. He purposely died on the cross. He died as a substitute for those who realize that they're truly guilty before God.

If you know you've got hell to pay for your sin, This is good news for you. So my friend, if you're struggling under the weight of your own sin, You've come into a building at the right time.

To hear God speak a word to you, That will bring great joy to you. The heart of this good news, Of which the angel in Luke 2 starts to declare, That God has become a man.

Merry Christmas. Amen. He's been born, But he lived a perfect life. He suffered, he died, and he was raised, In order to substitute himself for sinners, So that they would be forgiven of their sins.

[13:41] The very thing that you fear, my friend, That your sin stands against you, Jesus has addressed by dying on the cross. He references himself as a ransom.

He came as a ransom to pay for your sin. That's really good news.

This is, if you look in verse 47, Jesus, verse 46, it says, It's written that the Christ should suffer, And on the third day rise from the dead, And that repentance and forgiveness of sins Should be proclaimed.

It's through the incarnation, Suffering, death, and resurrection of Jesus, That God offers the forgiveness of sins To any sinner around the world.

It's wonderful good news. But you have to be willing to acknowledge the fact That you're a sinner.

This is not good news to those who don't think That their sin has a consequence with a living God.

[14:54] At the beginning of Luke, The good news is a birth announcement. A Savior's been born, Christ the Lord God. And by the end of Luke, The good news comes into full view.

This Savior born, Christ the Lord, He suffered, He died, And was raised. So, And this is the essential content Of the message of the gospel.

In which God offers full forgiveness, Full pardon, For all of your sin. You see, Christmas, Merry Christmas, It's about salvation.

It's about God coming to save. The incarnation is vital to the gospel, But it's not the whole gospel.

The whole gospel Is He was brought, He became a man, Suffered, died, raised.

It's all about Jesus. This good news, The angel declares, Verse 10, Shows up in the person of Jesus, Verse 11, Who He is, And what He's done.

[16:10] It's December 31st. And I'm not sure if you're the New Year's resolution type, But I've got a New Year's resolution for you to consider. If the gospel message is all about Jesus, Who He is, And what He's done, Can I just call you to make Jesus, Who He is, And what He's done, Your first priority in 2018.

That He becomes your first love. That He becomes your all-consuming love. That He becomes the one to whom you live for.

This is the gospel message. This is the good news. We talked about good news. Let's talk about the great joy. This angel comes in Luke 2.10.

He says, I bring you good news of great joy. What kind of joy are we talking about? Well, that great joy with which He looks talking about, Shows up in a different way in verse 47 of Luke 24.

And that repentance and forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed. The great joy that this angel speaks of, Of this child, Is the great joy of forgiveness of sins that He's going to bring.

[17 : 33] Let me ask you a question. Who would be more joyful? A man who makes \$45,000 a year and is forgiven of a \$10 debt?

Or another man who makes \$45,000 a year who's forgiven of a \$300,000 debt? Who would be more joyful? The guy forgiven of a \$300,000 debt.

Who would be more joyful? A 30-year-old woman pardoned of a misdemeanor with a small fine? Or a 30-year-old woman pardoned of a felony with a 15-year prison sentence?

Who would be more joyful? The 30-year-old woman who was pardoned of a felony with a 15-year prison sentence? Let me let you into something.

Our tendency as human beings is to minimize the offense of our sin against God. We tend to think of our sins against a holy God as misdemeanors which God is glad to look beyond.

[18 : 44] And so it shows up like this. A guy doesn't like another guy. And he says something like, well, I'm not killing anybody.

I just don't like the guy. Or it shows up like this. Man, it's not like I'm cheating on my wife, but man, I'd like to lay eyes on her a little bit more.

Hey, it's not like I'm lying under oath for something really important. It's just a little white lie. Why? We tend to minimize our wrongs.

Let me ask you this. What happens if those little misdemeanors were actually more grievous in God's sight than you realized? So what happens if the hate that God sees in your heart towards this other guy that you're not planning on murdering, but he sees it as the seed of murder for what it is, and it's grievous to him?

What happens if God sees the lust in your heart because that lust in your heart is adultery of your heart, and God is offended by that? He's the most faithful of all.

[20 : 09] And what if God sees the dishonesty with your little white lie, and he's repelled by it because he's the God of truth? He never lies. The typical way sinners measure their offense is by comparing their sin to the sin of other sinners.

I'm not that bad. Look at him. But the humble of heart measure the offense of their sin against a holy God and his holy will revealed in the scriptures.

So when you start to see your sin the way that God sees your sin, or you start to feel about your sin the way that God feels about your sin, do you know what's going to happen?

You're going to realize your great need for a great Savior. And that is a work of the Holy Spirit.

We learn from John 16 that the Holy Spirit, the third person of the Trinity, convicts sinners of their sin against God. The Holy Spirit shows us that our sinfulness goes beyond our own sense of self-disappointment and our own sense of disappointing others to helping us see that our sin is an offense against God.

[21 : 35] Do you know what happens when great sin is forgiven? Do you know what happens?

When you realize the greatness of your sin against a holy God and you realize what Jesus has done for you, gospel, what you then experience is great joy.

I've been forgiven much. Do you remember that prostitute who entered the house of Simon the Pharisee in Luke?

Jesus is sitting at table with this well-known Pharisee and this prostitute walks in and she just starts weeping over Jesus and she starts using her hair to clean his feet.

Jesus speaks a parable and the parable says, He who's been forgiven little loves little, but this woman who's been forgiven much, she loves much.

[22 : 34] She knows what she's been forgiven of. My friends, this morning, do you know what you've been forgiven of?

In order for you to experience the great joy of salvation in Jesus, you first have got to experience the godly grief over your sin. The great joy with which the angel speaks in Luke 2 is the great joy that springs from being forgiven by a great Savior.

It's all about a great salvation. Remember the song, Jesus paid it all, all to Him I owe. You can't sing that without joy.

Joy of being saved. Joy of being rescued. Is it personal? Is it personal?

Do you realize what you've been rescued from? One of the things as we go into 2018 is if you're here right now and you're like, you know what?

[23 : 48] I'm not sure if I fully get what Jesus has rescued me from. I'm not sure if I fully understand the grievous nature of my sin. Can I encourage you to take this step? Ask God to show you the depth of your sin.

God, would you help me to see how sinful I am? And what will happen is He'll show you and then what you'll see is the glory of Christ all the more and your joy will be deepened as a result.

What also will happen is this. If you have a growing sense of your own sinfulness in need of Christ and the great joy that comes from believing in Him, you're going to start looking at other people differently.

You're going to start wondering, man, do they have the joy? Do they know what Christ has done for them?

To be on mission for Jesus is to recognize, I am a great sinner who's been forgiven much by a great Savior.

[24 : 58] Let's look at the grand task. We've looked at the good news, the message about Jesus.

We've looked at the great joy that springs from realizing this Christ has substituted Himself for my great sin and now I'm forgiven and now let's look at the grand task.

In Luke 2.10, the angel says that this good news of great joy is for all the people. And the shepherds who are listening would have thought about it this way.

It's good for all the Jewish people. These shepherds, as I mentioned before, according to kind of Jewish cultural norms, the Jewish social standing, shepherds where they kind of click up on the social strata from lepers.

So this angel saying, hey, I bring you good news of great joy for all the people, even you low guys. This is good news. But they're probably thinking he's still within the Jewish society.

[26 : 10] If you flip back to Luke 24, verse 47, Jesus expands it. He's talking about, in verse 46, the Jewish Christ who would suffer and on the third day rise after being crucified.

And then in verse 47, we read, and that repentance and forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name, the name of Jesus, to all nations. Not just Jews, but to all non-Jews.

Jesus expands the scope of the mission. So the gospel message is a gospel message about a Jewish Christ who's God in the flesh, who suffered, crucified, and was raised.

And anyone who responds in repentance and faith has a great joy in that. And you don't have to be a Jew to believe it. Everyone needs to hear the message about Christ because everybody's a sinner.

For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. What Luke is getting at, at the end of Luke, here in Luke 24, this is the great commission.

[27 : 25] This is the call to the disciples of Jesus to go and proclaim. And what I want to bring you to is this, is that the risen incarnate Christ, who is the focus of this message, is presently reigning on high, advancing his kingdom around the world through the proclamation of the gospel.

There are people worshipping Jesus all around the world right now because they've experienced the great joy of his substitutionary death on their behalf.

The risen Christ, we've learned this morning from Simon, he's at work in Nepal. He's at work in Brazil. I talked to a man two weeks ago. God is at work in Brazil, China, North Korea, Kenya, Cuba, Iran, Israel, Russia, the United States of America.

Here's another way to think about it. God is spreading gospel joy to sinners around the globe. And Kenosha, this city of 100,000, this is our little slice of the world.

And so as a church, we're committed to partnering with people like The Rise around the world to make known Jesus to their people groups.

[28 : 47] But we're not going to leapfrog the mission field that God has called us to in order to be supporting foreign missions.

God has called us to a unique work of mission here in the city of Kenosha. Have you heard the expression, think globally, act locally?

That's the call of Christ on our church. We're going to be thinking globally. And where God provides opportunities to partner with other people, we'll consider it and take what is most wise.

But we're going to act locally. That's going to be our priority. A priority of advancing Christ's mission locally.

Secondly, there are people in this city who will respond in repentance and faith with great joy upon hearing the good news of Christ.

[29 : 51] Right now we're taking steps to that in a variety of ways. But God has recently brought an evangelist to our church. We're praying for more. And there is a growing burden among people in our church to open up their homes to people who don't presently believe yet to hear the gospel.

This morning I want to give you a very practical way to start thinking globally but acting locally. I'd like you to write this on your notes.

Write down three words. Neighborhood mission map. Neighborhood mission map. Here's what this is.

Think about where you live. Maybe you live in an apartment or maybe you live in a house on a block. You're looking down upon your apartment or block and what you're going to write on your neighborhood mission map is a scale with like little rectangles of all the houses within five doors of you.

Apartments within five doors of you. Write them down. And then here's the first step of putting together a neighborhood mission map. Write down all the names of your neighbors.

[31 : 06] Just write them down. And when you do that, your experience will be my experience when I did this a month ago. I know maybe half of them by name.

You know what that means? I've got a lot of nameless neighbors. And you know what makes it really easy to do? Just drive on right by. I don't know them. So the purpose of a neighborhood mission map is to start to get to know your neighbors.

And when you get to know their names, you're going to start seeing image bearers living around you. Image bearers that are under the consequence of sin and need to hear the gospel.

It's one thing to make a neighborhood mission map of your neighborhood and to see the nameless neighbors. It's another thing to make time and effort to go meet your nameless neighbors.

To compel you to cross the street on a January when it's 20 degrees and knock on your neighbor's door to get to know their names.

[32 : 23] What's going to compel you to do that? What's going to prompt you to do such a thing? Well, our risen and reigning Savior has given us the Holy Spirit to empower our ministry.

To compel us to cross the street. When we think globally and act locally on this huge call, this huge mission we're on, it's really important to realize too that God has made a promise.

So this fourth point, God's promise, the power of the mission. And here I'd like you to look at Luke 24, 48 and 49.

Jesus is speaking to his disciples and he says, you are witnesses of these things, my suffering, crucifixion, resurrection. And behold, I'm sending the promise of my Father upon you, but stay in the city until you are clothed with power from on high.

When Jesus says in verse 49, I'm sending the promise of my Father upon you, he's not speaking of a what, he's speaking of a who.

[33 : 46] The promised Holy Spirit. The third person of the Trinity. And the Holy Spirit, Jesus says, will clothe his disciples with power from on high to be his witnesses to Jerusalem and beyond.

to give them the courage and the boldness to proclaim the Jewish Christ incarnate, suffered, crucified, and raised, and now offers to all forgiveness.

One of the things Jesus knows about us is that we need power for the mission he's called us to.

And he's provided it in the Holy Spirit. Luke, who wrote the Gospel of Luke, also wrote Acts. And in Acts chapter 1, Luke picks up where his Gospel leaves off.

The risen Christ is in the upper room in Jerusalem with the disciples. And Jesus tells his disciples that they're going to receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon them to be his witnesses.

[35 : 00] Chapter 1, verse 8. And then these disciple witnesses empowered by the Holy Spirit, they're going to proclaim the Gospel to sinners in Jerusalem and Judea and to Samaria and to the end of the world to the nations.

They need Holy Spirit power to do that. They need Holy Spirit power to be faithful to the mission Jesus has entrusted to them.

And we need the Holy Spirit power to do the same. in Acts 2, Luke records what happens at Pentecost when the Holy Spirit comes down upon Christ's disciples and empowers them to be his witnesses.

It was the fulfillment of Joel chapter 2. And what happens throughout the book of Acts is this, the person of the Holy Spirit empowering ordinary Christians like you and me, empowering ordinary Christians to boldly proclaim the Gospel of Christ to those living right around them.

And the response varies. Some receive the glad tidings of the Gospel and they in great joy respond in repentance and faith while others resist and even persecute the very ones who are bringing them the Gospel.

[36 : 26] The book of Acts shows us that God's people empowered by the Holy Spirit bring the Gospel of Jesus to the nations.

Here's my question for you. Do you think that the same Holy Spirit who empowered the early church for bold witness a church that crossed cultural boundaries time and again a church that suffered great hardship and resistance but faithfully pressed on do you think the same Holy Spirit who empowered the early church do you think He's able to empower you to cross your street and knock on your neighbor's door to hear their name?

He is. He's more than able to do that. He is able to give you the courage to step out in faith and to meet your neighbors.

I think the question starts to become right now a question like this well how how do I access that? How am I empowered by the Holy Spirit to take a step like that?

Well let me just help you understand first off the Holy Spirit the moment you believed He indwelt you He lives in you He took up residence in you the moment you believed and He was the Holy Spirit who applied the shed blood of Jesus to all of your sin so that you were a new creation in Christ Jesus that's a work of the Holy Spirit in you the Holy Spirit is seeking to spotlight Jesus in your character and He's looking to spotlight Jesus through your witness John 16 14 and so the God who indwells you can I just try to convince you of something here?

[38 : 37] Could it be the Holy Spirit is actually eager to empower you to witness that He wants to He is ready and willing and available we just need to step out what we see from the early church is that when they encountered resistance and they needed courage do you know what they did?

they prayed and you know what happened? God shook the room and He filled them with His Holy Spirit and they boldly proclaimed God's Word Acts 4 31 so let me call you to something in your personal time of devotion to God would you begin to ask God to fill you with His Spirit afresh He may convict you of your sins that's just going to lead to great joy in Jesus but He also may burden you with your neighbors that's good when you gather with your life group ask God to pour out His Spirit upon you with the other members of your life group praying and thinking of other people other people around you who need Jesus Jesus the Holy Spirit is the power of the mission that Christ has called us to this Christmas season may be gone your Christmas tree might be lying horizontal in some

Christmas tree graveyard your plastic Jesus may be back in your attic but the risen reigning incarnate Christ is advancing His kingdom around the globe He's spreading the joy of salvation through the proclamation of the good news and the promised Holy Spirit who is active today is empowering God's people for the task and He's eager to empower you to proclaim Christ to our little slice of the world here in Kenosha what would happen if in 2018 these pews start filling up more and more with people who have been rescued from their sin and they are singing to the risen Christ out of hearts full of joy our Christ is on a mission and He's called each of us to be on mission with Him let's pray

God thank you for bringing the good news to our ear thank you God for the great joy many of us experience because we know you've delivered us from great sin God thank you for entrusting us with this grand task to bring the gospel to the nations and we want to think globally but act locally so God would you help us with that would you help us to start getting to know our nameless neighbors and God we would come to you now and we would ask that you would pour out your spirit afresh upon us your people and that you would shake our building and that you would empower us to proclaim the word to great effect for the joy of all people and the glory of your name amen thank you