

Jesus Sends Out the Twelve

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 07 January 2024

Preacher: Colin Dow

[0 : 00] Happy birthday, Crow Road Free Church! This year marks our 200th birthday.

What a time to be alive! Eighty years ago, one of our ministers wrote about our church. It is a missionary congregation in the truest sense, with a ministry of hope and restoration to the perishing at its door, as well as of light and liberty to the heathen from afar, the center of evangelistic effort and the rallying ground of the evangelistic forces of the city.

God has been faithful to us over the centuries. Surely ours, by the grace of God, is a church with mission at its heart.

Why should the church, and why should Crow Road Free Church, have mission at its heart? Because God has mission at His heart.

God has a mission-shaped heart, and we who are His children by faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, therefore have mission-shaped hearts also.

[1 : 24] Our tendency is not to keep the message of the gospel to ourselves, but to share it both by word and work, with a world that most desperately needs to experience it for ourselves.

As it was written, the perishing at our door, and the heathen from afar. Now, this passage in Luke 9 is the account of Jesus sending His twelve disciples out on short-term mission.

On the face of it, that's all it is. But the more we think through this passage, the deeper we get into the mission-shaped heart of God. The God who, before He sent the church on a mission for Christ, sent Christ on a mission for the church.

Let me say that again, because it undergirds everything we're going to look at today. Before God sent the church on a mission for Christ, He sent Christ on a mission for the church.

The more we think through the precise wording of this passage, the more we're drawn to the mission, not just upon which Jesus sent us as the church, but to the mission upon which God sent His Son Jesus.

[2 : 51] Namely, to proclaim both by word and work, the good news of the kingdom of God. Now, whilst not wishing to overcomplicate matters, because any fool can do that, it seems to me that without reference to God's mission-shaped heart in the sending of His Son to proclaim both by word and work the good news of the kingdom of God, we cannot understand the actions surrounding Jesus' sending out of His disciples.

And this is what makes this passage such good news for us and gives us as a church a mission-shaped heart. Our mission-hearted God sent His Son to proclaim both by words and works of the cross a new world of forgiveness, of love, of grace, and of hope.

Let me suggest that we can understand this double reference in our passage, the church being sent on a mission for Christ because Christ has first been sent on a mission for the church, under three headings, mission, message, method.

Mission, message, method. Even if we haven't quite understood up to this point, let's just remember, if you take nothing else away from today, when it comes to mission, Jesus doesn't ask us to do anything He hasn't Himself first done for us.

First of all then, mission. Mission. Our passage begins with Jesus calling the twelve disciples to Him.

[4 : 44] This is where all true Christian mission must begin. Not with our ideas, but with Jesus and His ideas. It's as we spend time with Jesus in His Word and in prayer, we hear His call to go out with the gospel and we are inwardly strengthened by Him.

Mission doesn't begin with our plans, but with our prayers. Human strategy. It begins with divine scripture.

The church's mission begins with Jesus, which is why, since our formation 200 years ago, our church has featured at least one weekly prayer meeting.

For it's here, as we spend time together with Jesus, He sends us out and empowers us for mission.

The two elements of the church's mission are described in verses 1 and 2. Jesus sent the twelve disciples to proclaim the kingdom of God, and Jesus gave the twelve disciples power and authority.

[6 : 00] Jesus sent the disciples on mission, and Jesus empowered them for mission. To be an apostolic church, we also go out on mission, having been strengthened and empowered by the living Jesus.

But to go back a step, when it comes to the mission of Jesus, He also was sent by His Father and empowered by the Holy Spirit.

First of all, Jesus sent His disciples. He sent them. In Luke 4.43, just a few chapters before, we read of a small but important episode in the life of Jesus.

Luke 4.43. Jesus had withdrawn to a quiet place, but the people begged Him not to leave their area. We read, but He said to them, we must preach, I must preach the good news of the kingdom of God to the other towns as well, for I was sent for this purpose.

To be on mission requires, first, that we are sent. And we learn from that verse in Luke 4.43 that Jesus was sent by His heavenly Father on mission.

[7 : 28] What we celebrated last month at Christmas wasn't the mere birth of a child, but God sending His Son to be our Savior. It was the loving decision of a wise and loving Father to send His Son.

The church, the Jesus who sends His church on mission is the Jesus who was conscious that He had been sent by His Father.

It's that sentness which helped Him endure through dark days of pressure and pain. He would say to Himself, I've been sent on a mission by my Father and I cannot give up.

So to be on mission requires that we're first sent. And through the apostles who here in Luke chapter 9 verse 2 represent the church, we too have been sent.

God the Father sent the Son. And God the Son has sent us. And that knowledge of our sentness can also help us through dark days of pressure.

[8 : 44] When for the hundredth time the gospel has been thrown back in our faces and we ask ourselves, what's the point of mission anyway? We remember that faithfulness to God's commission isn't about the harvest we reap, but the seeds that we sow.

We also remember that the authority we need for going out with the message of the gospel doesn't come from us. It comes from the God who has sent us.

When people say to us, by what right do you bother me with all this gospel talk? Why can't you just leave me alone to get on with my life? We remember that God has sent us on mission.

Just as surely as Christ was sent by His Father, so the church has been sent by Christ. Sent, that's the first element of mission.

Secondly, we have been empowered. We have been empowered. God, having sent Jesus on mission, gave Jesus the means by which to accomplish the mission.

[9 : 55] He sent the Holy Spirit to empower Jesus. After Jesus' temptation, we read in Luke chapter 4 and verse 14.

Luke 4 verse 14. And Jesus returned in the power of the Spirit to Galilee. God empowered His Son by the Holy Spirit so that Jesus could accomplish the mission for which God had sent Him out.

To go out on mission doesn't merely require being sent, but also being empowered to be given the tools and abilities we need to achieve the task we have been set.

If someone says to us, I want you to build me a wooden table, but they don't give us the tools or materials we need to do it, and we ourselves are no use at any form of joinery, it's not a fair task to be set.

God sent His Son on mission. And as Anne read to us from the baptism of Jesus, He filled Him with His Holy Spirit. In our passage in Luke chapter 9 and verses 1 through 6, Jesus sends the apostles on mission, and we read in verse 1, He gave them power and authority.

[11 : 28] He gave them the tools and abilities they needed to achieve the task He had set them. In Acts chapter 2, we read of the Holy Spirit descending upon the apostles, just as He had descended upon Christ on the day of His baptism, as Anne read to us.

We, the church, have been blessed with the Holy Spirit's presence and with His power, so that as we go out with the gospel, we have all the power and authority we need to achieve the task God has set for us.

We do not go out alone, for the Spirit and His power is with us and is for us. For 200 years, our church has been aware of having been sent by God on mission, and by His grace, we have experienced the spiritual empowerment for mission.

If ever we should lose that sense of being sent by God and that divine imperative of mission, our first recourse must be repentance and a plea for the Holy Spirit to refashion our minds and our hearts and our wills to reflect the mission heart of God.

Mission, first of all. Second, message, message. God has sent His church on mission, and that mission is to proclaim a message.

[13 : 06] Both by the words we speak and the works we do, God's mission is the proclamation of a message. In Luke chapter 9, verse 2, we are told that Jesus sent His disciples out to proclaim the kingdom of God.

This then is the message we proclaim both by word and works, the kingdom of God. In Luke 4, 43, a verse which we've already touched on, in the context of how Jesus has been sent by His Father on mission, we hear Jesus' voice saying, I must preach the good news of the kingdom of God to the other towns as well, for this I was sent.

our Master was sent by His Father on mission with this purpose, the proclamation both by word and work of the good news of the kingdom of God.

Everything Jesus said and did, all His miraculous works, was with this purpose in mind, the proclamation of the good news of the kingdom of God.

And in the same way, the message with which we have been sent out is the good news of the kingdom of God. We've not been sent out with a political, social, cultural, or philosophical message, but a message about a kingdom.

[14 : 35] Not a kingdom of men, but the kingdom of God. Now, the kingdom of God can be understood in three ways. First, we understand the kingdom of God as having a king.

Jesus called the Christ the word Christ, meaning king. The coming of the kingdom is the coming of Christ. In other words, the church's message must center on Jesus.

We must proclaim Him. It's our greatest privilege to declare the glory of Christ our King and to offer Him freely to all who will have Him. It's our greatest honor as the church to proclaim the majesty of Christ our King and to join our voices with the angels and archangels in heaven as we worship Him.

A church without Christ at the center of its message has nothing to say. Second, we understand the kingdom of God in terms of its ethics, the standards of the kingdom.

And these Jesus laid down for us in His famous sermon on the plain in Luke chapter 6. Love your enemies as you wish others to do to you, do to them.

[15 : 58] Be merciful to others even as in God Christ has been merciful to us. Bear the good fruit of a repentant and faithful heart. Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ with all your heart and build your lives upon following Him, obeying His word.

The kingdom of God begins with faith in its King, King Jesus. And it expresses itself in Christ-like character, in loving one's enemies, in showing mercy to the guilty.

There could be no more counter-cultural message than this, where the unlovable are loved and the unforgivable are forgiven, where society's outcasts are freely welcomed and the interests of others are placed before our own, a church dominated by grace and forgiveness, by mercy and humility.

But thirdly, the kingdom of God is about a new creation, a new creation, a new heavens, a new earth in which righteousness dwells, a world with no sin and no death and no pain, no tears, a world of love and peace, everlasting joy and delight.

It's a world at which we presently cannot see, but there the lame walk and the blind see and the deaf hear. It's the ultimate reality of which this world is but a shadow.

[17 : 31] It's a world which is now and not yet. It's a coming world where we'll see Christ rest and our sins shall be no more. So this is the kingdom of God according to Luke.

The threefold message of king, ethic, and new creation. And this is the message the church is sent to proclaim both by word and work.

It's not a message about the goodness of man. It's about the goodness of God in giving us his son, our king as a sacrifice for our sin to change our hearts and desires so as to prepare us for life in his new creation.

It's deeply counter-cultural and it's a world-changing message. It's the message of the gospel to which God calls us, each one, to respond in repentance and faith.

Repent and believe the gospel. Jesus himself famously commanded us. If ever our church should lose the centrality of Jesus Christ and his kingdom gospel, it will quickly die and become, like so many others, pages in historical record which in a hundred years people will consult in the Mitchell Library.

[18 : 59] ministry. This is the message the living Christ has commanded his church to proclaim, the kingdom of God and its call to repent and believe the good news.

A living faithfulness to that message among us and from us brings us closer to the mission heart of God, which is always seeking the lost, which is always forgiving the sinner, which is always loving the outcast.

Remember, we have been sent on mission because God first sent Christ on mission for us. And then thirdly, method.

Method. The message of the gospel, the good news of the kingdom of God, is the most important message any of us will ever hear. It is God's announcement of peace to all who will believe.

The message itself is far too important for the method of its proclamation to be left to chance. God does not only give us a message to proclaim, but the method by which we are to proclaim it.

[20 : 16] In our passage, we both have the big picture and the important details. The big picture method being preaching and healing, the important details being the instructions Jesus gave to His disciples.

Remember, at every stage of today's study, this passage is teaching us not just about the church being sent on a mission for Christ, but Christ being sent, first of all, on a mission by His Father for the church.

It applies, first of all, then, to Jesus, and only then to us. So, we have, first of all, then, the big picture, the big picture. In verse 2, we read, sent them out to proclaim the kingdom of God and to heal.

This is the method God has appointed for His church to proclaim the good news of the kingdom of God, preaching and healing. They are not two activities, they are one activity, speaking the word of the kingdom, and doing the work of the kingdom.

They belong together, lest the words be emptied of their meaning and the works be for nothing. The works of the kingdom are evidence that the words of the kingdom are true.

[21 : 45] All too often, Reformed evangelicals like ourselves have been very good at speaking about the sacrificial love of God. But not really so good at demonstrating it.

The word Jesus uses here for proclaim, *caruso*, literally means to herald. It does not mean to teach.

It does not mean to discuss. It does not mean to debate. It does not mean to gossip the gospel. It means to herald. There are times when to most effectively proclaim the gospel and to discharge the mission God has set us.

The church needs to set aside conversation and to engage in the work of a herald. In announcing the great truths of the gospel, the sacrificial death of Christ, His victorious resurrection, His majestic reign.

But it's not enough just to preach with words. We must back up the words we speak in the name of Jesus with the works we do in the name of Jesus.

[22 : 56] Works of mercy, works of healing, works of compassion. Again, for many years, Reformed evangelicals like ourselves have suffered from a gap in our mercy ministry of failing to understand the central nature of the works in which we must engage in Christian mission.

These works providing evidence of the authenticity of our message. Ours is a God-given responsibility to proclaim the gospel both by words and works.

But it's ours because it was first Christ's. Again, going back to that passage in Luke 4, 43, we read the words of Jesus.

I must preach the good news of the kingdom of God to the other towns as well, for I was sent for this purpose, to preach. And then in Luke chapter 5, verse 17, we read of Jesus, that the power of the Lord was with him to heal.

The church is sent to preach and heal because Christ was first sent by his Father to preach and heal. He was sent to save us from our sins.

[24 : 20] And now we go in his name employing his methods to proclaim both by word and work that anyone who believes in Jesus Christ, anyone, anyone here, anyone walking down Dumbarton Road or up Crow Road, anyone who believes in Jesus Christ shall be saved.

For 200 years, by God's grace, we preach the message of the gospel faithfully and passionately. Our task is to continue to ensure that we do it both by word and work.

But then there are also important details, important details. From verses 3 through 5, Jesus gives his disciples instructions about how they are to proceed in their mission of proclaiming the good news of Jesus, both by word and work.

Now, it's clear as we read these verses that the instructions he gives them are temporary, they are time-bound. For example, he tells them not to bring any money with them.

Now, for a short time, that's fine. But long-term mission requires funding. Details like this were the first to alert me to the truth behind the message of this passage, that it's primarily talking about Jesus being sent for the church, not the church being sent for him.

[25 : 52] Because in his public ministry, Jesus carried no money or bread. he stayed only when he was welcomed and left when he was rejected.

But perhaps there are one or two timeless principles we can draw from these verses. Like, for example, the principle of shaking the dust from our feet when our message has been rejected.

Shaking the dust from our feet when our message has been rejected. There are places in our beloved land where the gospel has been preached for hundreds of years and there is very little response.

Very little. Perhaps it's time we now focused on new areas of Scotland where the gospel has not been heard at all. These details also highlight for us how important it is that we stay on task.

That rather than getting all comfortable and settling down, we remember we are all missionaries of the cross, all of us. We go out for Christ because Christ first came down for us.

[27 : 02] But this passage more than anything else teaches us about the priorities of Christ, how being in very nature God, he emptied himself for us, he became a man for us, he became obedient to death for us, he died on the cross to take away all our sins, to give us eternal life with him, and to provide us with a new reason to live, to proclaim the infinite and everlasting glory of his love in the gospel.

He who created the fabric of the universe had no money or bread. If ever we should forget that, we shall not reach our 250th anniversary, never mind our 500th.

God's grace, we are, by God's grace, a missionary congregation in the truest sense, with a ministry of hope and restoration to the perishing at its door, as well as of light and liberty to the heathen from afar, the center of evangelistic effort and the rallying ground of the evangelistic forces of the city.

By God's grace, we may be those things, but only because first Christ came down from heaven to give us hope and to restore us to new life in him.

It is now our delight and our privilege to go out for him and to continue the good work which in his mercy we've been engaged in for the past 200 years.

[28 : 52] Happy birthday, Crow Road Free Church. Let us pray. Our God and Father, we thank you for those first few days of the life of our congregation 200 years ago.

We thank you for your faithfulness to us over all those years. Lord, we repent of those years where we became inwardly focused and overly concerned about ourselves and the things which were important to us rather than being deeply grieved by the pain of our city and the things which mattered most to its peoples.

Lord, we ask that you would focus us once again upon the Christ who was sent for us and the kingdom he was sent to preach, that we may both by word and work be faithful servants and cross-shaped missionaries of the gospel.

We ask these things in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.