

Evangelisation of Europe

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Preacher: Colin Dow

[0 : 00] 6-10, Mission Matters. Among all the Bible stories, the account of the Gospel's expansion through the early church in the book of Acts may be the most exciting of all.

Covering the years AD 30 to AD 60, the church is on mission. Spreading from Jerusalem to Europe, the Gospel of Jesus Christ, his cross and resurrection is rapidly making its way into the heart of the Roman Empire.

By the end of the book, Gentile believers are flooding into the church. The church's leadership is changing guard as the first generation apostles are being replaced by a new generation of pastors and teachers.

Many of whom were Gentiles, but all of whom have been discipled and mentored by the apostles. It is through that generation the Gospel will make its way further afield.

Taking root in modern day France and Spain, northern Africa, and if tradition is to be believed, as far east as India. The book of Acts is telling the exciting story of how much mission matters to God.

[1 : 19] So much so that the early church in its entirety was focused on bringing the Gospel of Jesus Christ to new people in new places.

Guided and empowered by the Holy Spirit, by the end of Acts, the name of Jesus is being spoken in the imperial throne room of the emperor himself.

Mission matters to God. Mission matters to his church. Does mission matter to us as the family of Glasgow City Free Church? I'm talking here both about mission we might call common, but also about daring mission that crosses borders and boundaries.

Following God's lead to proclaim Christ to new people in new places. Who knows what God will do if we will but take seriously the teaching and example in Acts chapter 16 verses 6 through 10.

And prove that mission does not only matter to God, but mission matters to us. I want to look at three issues concerning this fascinating and world-changing bridge in the movement of Gospel mission here in Acts 16, 6 through 10.

[2 : 44] Mission management, message, and membership. Now my intention is not to make anyone feel guilty in any way about their lack of mission involvement, but to motivate us.

To invest ourselves in the mission of God. In whatever way God calls us. And the Spirit leads us. Because ultimately, mission matters.

First of all, mission management. Mission management. On first inspection, these verses seem to be almost exclusively taken up with issues of guidance.

As we learn from verse 4, Paul and his companions have been traveling from town to town and speaking exclusively to churches in these areas. Strengthening them.

Delivering to them the decisions the apostles had reached in Jerusalem. The region is described in verse 6 as being Phrygia and Galatia. Present day central Turkey.

[3 : 50] From there they traveled northwest. Until they reached the border of Bithynia. Which today is up the north of Turkey on the Black Sea coast.

If anyone's been on holiday to Sinop. That is in modern day Turkey. Modern day Bithynia. Modern day Turkey, yeah. But rather than entering, they turned west until they arrived at the Aegean seaport of Troas.

From which they sailed for Macedonia. Modern day northern Greece. Now let's think about that for a moment. Paul and his companions are moving here in an unpredictable direction.

Rather than go through the heavily populated region of Asia, today's western Turkey. They take a loop around it and they head for northern Greece into the continent of Europe.

Rather than consolidating their position in Phrygia and Galatia. They press on to pastors entirely new for the gospel. If Paul had such a thing as a mission committee overseeing his work.

[4 : 54] That has stopped him in his tracks and said, Now Paul, stay where you are. And don't take on anything new. And not for one second am I disputing the vital importance of mission committees in the management of missionaries.

However, in Acts, God proves that he is his own mission committee. Why then did Paul and his companions engage on the mission they did?

And who was managing the direction they took? It's quite clear from the text that they had other ideas. That they wanted to preach the gospel in the Roman province of Asia.

That's today's western Turkey. And in Bithynia, that's today's northern Turkey. But they didn't get what they wanted. For some reason, they were kept from preaching the word in Asia.

And they weren't allowed in to Bithynia. If you were to ask Paul and his companions to report home of their five-year mission vision, it would have read something like this.

[5 : 58] Well, we're going to strengthen the churches in central Turkey. And then we're going to move on to western Turkey and plant new churches there. And then we're going to swing north to northern Turkey and plant churches there also.

And again, I'm not belittling vision documents in any way. But what I am saying is that God has a habit of ignoring our plans. Each congregation in our denomination has been set the task of drawing up a vision statement and a plan for mission.

And it's a good and laudable aim to be strategic in what we can and cannot do. And these vision documents and mission strategies are to be forwarded to the central offices of our denomination for scrutiny and review.

A senior minister friend of mine in private conversation over dinner one day whimsically remarked to me, Well, I can tell you one person who will never look at our vision documents and mission strategies.

God. Ah, yes, by all means, let's draw up these vision documents and mission strategies. But if my experience is anything to go by, and his also. Yesterday's strategy plans most often becomes today's scrap paper.

[7 : 15] It's not because making plans and having a vision and developing strategies is bad. What's the alternative? Being aimless, scattergun and blind.

But our sovereign God has a habit of blowing our vision documents out of the water and doing things in our churches which are very different from what we might expect. Mission matters too much to him to leave it entirely to us.

The other reason that God often ignores our plans is because if our plans are successful, we are only too eager to accept the praise for our competence and our professionalism and our foresightedness, rather than offer praise to the God for his sovereign blessing of our unworthy work. Well, I can tell you one person who will never look at our vision documents and mission strategies. God. Said in jest, I guess, but with a serious point.

Mission matters way too much for God to leave its management entirely to us. Rather, because his plans are greater for us than we can dare to dream, he writes in red ink all over our strategies and plans with the words, Think bigger, my children.

[8 : 38] Think bigger. Think bigger. Paul and his companions had their vision document ripped up before them because God had something bigger for them in store.

It is, after all, most obviously God who was managing their mission. In verse 6, we're told that they were kept from preaching. They were kept by the Holy Spirit from preaching the word in the province of Asia.

What that means, I don't know. Does it mean that they just had this gut instinct that it was wrong? Even though this Roman province had a fairly high population and was a highly strategic center, they were kept from preaching the word there.

God made it impossible for them to put down roots. The Holy Spirit, as you know, is intimately involved in the proclamation of the gospel. But on this occasion, he actually prevents the apostle and his missionary companions from preaching about Jesus there.

Then in verse 7, The Spirit of Jesus does not permit them to enter into the northern province of Bithynia. And I rather think that we're to understand the Holy Spirit and the Spirit of Jesus as the same person here, the third person of the Trinity, the Holy Spirit himself.

[9 : 56] And again, the Holy Spirit empowers his people for the proclamation of the gospel. But on this occasion, he forbids them from entering Bithynia, modern-day northern Turkey.

So mission matters to God. But what is he doing by preventing Paul and his companions entering and establishing churches in these provinces? Well, he's forcing Paul and his companions west, northwest, until they finally arrive at the Aegean seaport of Troas on the extreme northwestern coast of modern-day Turkey.

The Spirit is forcing them to go where he wants them to go. And while they're in Troas, Paul's got a vision of a man of Macedonia. The Macedonian Greeks wore certain clothing.

And they had a certain regal look about them. So Paul knew exactly who it was he was seeing in his vision. It wasn't a dream. It was a vision sent by God.

And this man of Macedonia was pleading with him, begging him on his knees, urging him, saying, come over to Macedonia and help us. God is managing Paul's mission.

[11 : 15] Never against his will, but forcing him west until finally Paul and his companions get the message and they make ready to leave for Macedonia.

For the first time, the gospel is going to be proclaimed on the shores of Europe. Not because Paul planned it that way.

Not because a mission committee back in Jerusalem gave him a challenge, but because mission matters to God. The millions in Europe matter to him.

And so he redirects Paul from preaching duties in modern-day Turkey to go and plant churches in Europe. I have little doubt that there were already Jewish Christians living in Europe who had become Christians on the day of Pentecost in Jerusalem.

But for the first time, with intention, one of God's apostles was stepping onto Europe's landmass with the express intention of proclaiming the kingdom of God and planting Christian churches made up of both Jew and Gentile.

[12 : 35] Mission matters to God and so in Acts 16, he takes a direct hand in its management. And I'm inclined to say that God takes no less a hand in its management today except through different means.

Who is to say that the Holy Spirit is any less active today than he was back then? Directing and managing the mission of his church.

Mission matters no less to God today than it did back then. Well, in light of the knowledge that God manages the mission of his church, what kind of people ought we to be?

We cannot rely upon the same immediate means Paul did, but rely on the management of God we must. It is no coincidence that those Christians who are most devoted to mission are also those who are most devoted to prayer.

Because it is in prayer we are pleading with God for his guidance of our mission. By all means, we need to prepare strategy documents, but we need to soak them in earnest prayer, believing that God can and most often will ignore them and do better things for us instead.

[14 : 03] And if that insults us, so be it. Mission matters way more to God than it does to us. In the first week of September, the Free Church is engaging in a week of mission called Generation 19.

That week we'll be trying to focus our minds on mission for the entire week. Now what shall that week look like in the life of Glasgow City Free Church? Well in some ways, it will look the same as every other week because every activity of our church is geared toward mission.

However, in light of God's management, the one thing we shall strive toward in our week of mission is earnest pleading prayer that God will do bigger things through us than we can dream.

He may not guide us to a western seaport like Troas, today's Alapul, and encourage us to evangelize a whole new continent, Lewis.

But he will lead us to old people and to new people, to new places and to old places, with whom we can share the good news of salvation in Jesus Christ, perhaps even a place like Town Head.

[15 : 26] prayer and mission are not opposites. Rather, holding a prayer meeting is the most missional activity in which a church family can engage.

Mission matters. Secondly, mission message. Mission, mission message.

what is mission such that it matters so deeply to God? What is it Paul and his companions were bringing to Europe?

In verse 6, we read the preaching of the word. In verse 9, help. In verse 10, the preaching of the gospel. The mission message is the gospel of God contained in the word of God which helps to bring people to God.

We must never, ever lose our focus on that, that the mission of the church, though it may be broad, narrows down to this, the gospel of God contained in the word of God which helps to bring people to God.

[16:36] Any activity of our church which falls short of proclaiming the gospel of God from the word of God with the expression and tension of helping to bring people to God is not genuine mission in the New Testament sense of the word.

Now the most important of these three terms which make up the mission of God is the gospel. You read it in verse 10. Literally, the good news, the evangel.

As you work your way through the book of Acts, noting those texts which use this word gospel, you begin to understand several things about this good news which Paul and his companions were taking to the continent of Europe.

First, it is the good news about Jesus. It is the good news about Jesus. So for example, in Acts 11 verse 20 we learn that the good news is about the Lord Jesus.

Why does mission matter to God? Because it is all about his beloved son. And what father among us here does not love to hear the name of their beloved children?

[17:57] Let's never forget that our mission as a church is not primarily about meeting people's needs. It is about the Lord Jesus. That mission without him is no mission.

But then going further in Acts 17 verse 18 when Paul reaches Athens we read that he was preaching the good news about Jesus and his resurrection or more literally perhaps Jesus and his resurrection he proclaimed.

Resurrection presupposes death but it is the resurrection Paul most often focuses his attention upon as the good news of the gospel.

That Jesus Christ having been crucified has been raised from the dead and is Lord. In the book of Acts a gospel with no resurrection is no gospel.

It is the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead which fills the gospel with meaning and power. and we want our mission as a church to leave people in no doubt that yes Jesus died on the cross but even more importantly Jesus was raised from the dead to new life.

[19:23] More than that in Acts 13 38 the good news is explained in these words through Jesus the forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you.

And then in Acts chapter 10 verse 36 Peter summarizes the gospel by calling it the good news of peace through Jesus Christ who was Lord of all.

This is what Jesus has achieved and what makes it such good news for a helpless humanity. That Jesus has died and risen again for a helpless humanity by making peace with God by the forgiveness of our sins.

That in him Jesus Christ there is forgiveness for anyone who should believe. Anyone. The peace of which Peter speaks here is not so much a subjective tranquility that you get by kind of transcendental meditation or something like that.

It is the cessation of God's righteous judgment against our sin. It is the promise of his salvation. This is the gospel message that through the death and resurrection of our Lord Jesus there is forgiveness of sin and peace with God.

[20:42] Mission matters to God. Can you see why? Because it's all about his glorious love and the achievements of his son Jesus Christ.

Christ. This is the church's delight and duty to honour and love God to the extent that we too want to proclaim his son's glorious love.

We too want to hear his name being worshipped and his life being lived by new people in new places. We long for the whole world on bended knee to lovingly confess Jesus Christ is Lord.

I have a confession which probably only Kathimer knows. I rather fancy getting a tattoo on my arm with the words Jesus Christ is Lord.

Mission is that burning desire and activity of God's church whereby we draw a tattoo upon this world and all its peoples with the words Jesus Christ is Lord.

[22:08] I'm probably not allowed to get that tattoo and that's fine. But we want that our family and our neighbourhoods and our workplaces and our city has that tattoo written on its heart.

This is the message of mission. Anything more than that is less and anything less than that is less also. And you know if we take what the man of Macedonia said seriously proclaiming the gospel of Jesus Christ is the most helpful activity in which the church can engage.

Remember how he said come over to Macedonia and help us? As a church we can choose to engage our energies in many different activities many of which will if we're not careful end up being non gospel.

If we really want to help our family and our city and our nation and our world the best way to do it is to proclaim the good news of Jesus and to call for faith and trust in him.

Paul and his companions never helped the continent of Europe more than they did in Acts 16 by catching a boat from northern Turkey across the Aegean to modern Greece.

[23 : 27] Mission matters to God. That's why he does not leave its management entirely to us nor its message rather both are of divine origin.

Mission message. And then finally mission membership. I want us to close by noticing some of the smallest words in our passage and these are very important words.

In verse 6 we read Paul and his companions. Then in verse 6 they're also referred to as they and them. Again in verse 7 they.

But by verse 10 the writer changes form and refers to Paul and his companions as we and us. And yes in all probability this teaches us that Luke the writer of Acts joined Paul and his companions at this stage.

But more importantly from our perspective what this tells us is that Paul did not engage in the mission of the church alone. Paul was not a lone wolf.

[24 : 41] he was not a loose cannon. Rather having been commissioned by the church in Acts 15 40 and having chosen Silas as a companion and then having chosen Timothy as his disciple Luke now joins him.

There are now at least four of them involved in this mission. Not only does God guide his mission, not only is the gospel of God the content of his mission, but he intends his mission to be carried out by groups of Christians, not just by individuals.

We can talk about Paul and his missionary journeys just as long as we understand that Paul never undertook his missionary journeys alone, but that he intentionally chose companions so that as a team they could maximize both the effect and impact of the gospel they preached.

Each of his companions had different gifts, but Paul wisely drew them together and together they engaged in the mission of God. Mission matters so much to God that he encourages us to work together with other Christians in its pursuit.

I heard a quote at this year's General Assembly which summarizes this point really well. Teamwork makes the dream work. Teamwork makes the dream work.

[26 : 11] Our dream under the management of God's Holy Spirit as Glasgow City Free Church is to proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ. But we shall resolve to pursue our dream not by working alone but together.

Jesus chose twelve disciples and together they worked to establish the kingdom of God. Now these disciples are working with other Christians to extend the boundaries of the kingdom of God even into Europe.

In our Western society we are very much brought up as individualists. We pride ourselves upon our individual achievements and enjoy our individual pursuits.

But it was not this way for the society in which Jesus and Paul lived. They were not focused on the individual nearly as much as they were focused on the community.

What we do we do as a community and what we do we do for the community. When I was a boy as a community we would go out and dig the peats and if you want to know what that is I'll speak to you afterwards about that.

[27 : 30] Yesterday we dug the peats for the Gordon family who live down the road. Today we're digging the peats for the Sutherland family who live just across the field.

Tomorrow we're digging the peats for my family. But what we did we did together even if it was not our own peats we were digging. Fishermen in my home village of Golsby having hauled in a really good catch would make sure that every home in the village especially those of the older and the most vulnerable.

They would ensure that every home in the village had a fish to eat. To what extent are we forming ourselves into groups with the express intention of mission to our family, friends, workmates and communities?

Perhaps not all of us here and that's okay feel confident to speak to people about God. But we sure can speak to God about the people others are able to speak to.

If we do mission alone we will be picked off by the devil's discouragement and the coldness of secular rejection. But if we engage in mission together when one falls down the other can pick him up and when one is silent the other can speak.

[29 : 03] Mission matters to God to the extent that he is calling us together as a family in Glasgow City Free Church to engage in it. And I don't mind telling you that engaging in the intentional mission of Christ is at the same time the scariest but most exciting activity in which a human being can engage.

As God begins to guide us to new people in new places. As God does shall we say unpredictable things in and through us. As we are resolved to proclaim both by word and work the gospel of his son.

As we work together to build the kingdom of God. God. The degree to which mission matters to God becomes the degree to which it matters to us.

And so I close with this last question. Asked as Paul and his companions stood on the threshold of Europe. Gospel mission matters to God.

How much does it matter to you? Let us pray. We worship you Lord for your guidance of Paul and his companions so that against all predictions they looped their way around the populous regions of north and western Turkey and ended up crossing the boat to Macedonia in response to a vision you sent them.

[30 : 45] And we thank you that we are direct descendants of that first beachhead made in Philippi. We thank you and praise you oh lord that today we can worship you in freedom and we can worship you with joy because over the years tens of millions of us as Europeans have come by faith to know the joy and freedom of following Jesus Christ.

Christ. What we experience for ourselves oh lord we long for our family and our friends. We long oh lord for the words Jesus Christ is lord to be spiritually tattooed on our city.

lord mission does matter to us. We ask and pray that you would give us a heart to see Jesus Christ and his glory the wonder of his love proclaimed in this place.

In Jesus name we pray these things. Amen.