

Made for Mission

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[0 : 00] Well, this is the second in four messages having to do with a new effort at organizing the ministry of this church.

They've been called spheres. They've been called something else. I think we finally landed on spheres. And there are four different spheres, four different areas of existence of our life here as a church that we believe are drawn from the Bible, indicative of what God asks of us as his people.

And there are two verses that are driving this effort. One is from Ephesians 4, 11 and 12. He gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers to equip the saints for the work of ministry.

And the other is from John 15 when Jesus says, I am the vine, you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit. Taking those two verses together, then the hope under this banner is equipping for gospel fruitfulness.

Equipping for gospel fruitfulness. And the four areas are worship, mission, discipleship and service.

[1 : 21] Now last Sunday, Colin, our minister, spoke on worship. And it was right. It was the right component to begin with. Because as he suggested, if you don't get worship right, then you can't hope to get everything else right.

And he talked about it in three ways. One was selfless satisfaction. That is, when we come to worship, what we desire is that God would be pleased with what it is that we're doing.

And when he is pleased, we're pleased. So it's not focused on us. It truly is focused on God. And also that our worship should be salvation shaped.

That is, that is either leading us to the cross or causing us to reflect upon the cross or to respond to the cross. So our worship is something that brings us to the cross, to this gracious gift of the sacrifice of Christ, our redemption.

And the last was self-abasing worship. Now self-abasing maybe doesn't sound like a positive thing. But the idea behind that is that really because of what God has done, because of who he is and what he has done in our salvation shaped worship, we humble ourselves before him.

[2 : 31] In fact, he used the phrase that we bow down our souls before God. You know, you can bow down before God and your soul is nowhere near it, right? You're just on your knees. But the idea is what's going on inside of us recognizes the glory and majesty of God and humbles ourselves.

So that was what was spoken about last week. And this week, we're going to be talking about mission. Mission. The goal of the sphere is to equip the church for mission, fruitfulness in mission.

Now I always like to look up a dictionary definition of some of the words because we use English and the words get used in different ways. And so here's a dictionary definition of mission.

What is mission or rather what is a mission? An important assignment carried out for political, religious or commercial purposes, typically involving travel.

An important assignment. So if you think in the political realms, you're thinking perhaps of a diplomatic mission, right? Someone's been sent off to go to speak to the heads of another country in order to work out perhaps some differences.

[3 : 42] Or if you think of a commercial mission that someone's gone to go to another country to sit down with a producer of certain goods that are needed and they work out a deal.

Well, what's the mission for us? Let's ask ourselves, what's the mission of the church? What's our assignment? Well, I'm going to suggest the assignment that's driving this sphere is spelled out by Jesus in two different places for two different reasons.

One is from what we read from Matthew 28 that he comes and he says, All authority in heaven and earth has been given to me. Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you.

And the other I would suggest is from Acts chapter one, when Jesus, again, the post-resurrected state, he tells his disciples to not depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the promise of the Father, the promise of the Holy Spirit.

He says, Now, both of those encounters that Jesus had with his disciples involve the church getting the message out about Jesus into the world.

[5 : 03] Go into all the world, make disciples, you'll be witnesses for me from Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, to the ends of the earth. Now, what's the motive behind this assignment that we've been given?

I mean, if you think about the diplomatic mission that might be sent, what's the motive there? Well, you know, perhaps there's some tension between these two nations and he's going to go kind of smooth this thing out.

And what's the motive behind that commercial mission? Bottom line, money. We want to make the most money the most efficient way we can. What's the motive behind the assignment that's been given to us?

It's love. Love. It's to rescue people from their folly. For God so loved the world that he gave his only son that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.

Now, if you've not heard that before and you hear that they shall not perish, why would someone perish? Well, we learn about that because human beings, we read in there in the chapters in Genesis, they were given a task.

[6 : 12] And they were told to not eat of one particular tree, but they did. And that has brought humanity into a state of where they are now what are called sinners.

That they transgress God's law. And what Paul teaches, the apostle Paul teaches, is that there's no distinction. He says, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.

All, Jew, Gentile, slave, free, all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. Because, he said then, the wages of sin, what you earn for sin, he says, is death.

But God has acted in love by sending his son to save us. Elsewhere, Paul writes, we're justified by his grace.

That's it. We are made righteous. We are no longer considered sinful. By his grace, as a gift, through the redemption, through the salvation that is in Christ Jesus. Whom God, the Father, put forward as something that will propitiate his wrath.

[7 : 12] That will appease his wrath. A propitiation by his blood to be received by faith. As again, as he said, the wages of sin is death. But the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus, our Lord.

See, the motive behind our mission is God's love. To save sinful human beings. That's our assignment. To participate in what God is doing to rescue sinful human beings from his wrath.

And that's why this mission, this assignment that we're beginning, is so important. Remember, this is famous stuff if you've been around the church for a while. But listen to what Paul says in Romans chapter 10.

If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God has raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For there is no distinction between people. For the same Lord is Lord of all, bestowing his riches on all who call on him.

All are sinners and fall short of the glory of God. But all can also be redeemed through what God has done. Because Paul says, for everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.

[8 : 17] But he asks this question. How will they call on him in whom they have not believed? Because that salvation comes to us by faith. And how are they to believe in him in whom they have never heard?

And how are they to hear without someone preaching? And how are they to preach unless they are sent? As it is written, how beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news. See, the motive behind the assignment, the sending, is love.

God's love. God's love. So the need to fulfill this mission, this assignment, is critical. Because in the end, it's eternal bliss for those who believe.

And it's eternal torment for those who do not. Now, what's important to note, that this assignment that we've been given, is coupled with the authority and power to carry it out.

Jesus says that he possesses all authority to direct his followers to carry out the assignment that he gives us. Hence, the passage is traditionally called, as it was even said in the Bible that I had opened before me, the Great Commission.

[9 : 25] That descriptor, the Great Commission, recognizes the assignment, the mission, and also the authority to carry out. They've been commissioned to carry it out. But we have not only the authority to carry it out, we have the power.

Because of the Holy Spirit, who himself has been tasked with making Jesus known. And he is present to empower us to carry out the assignment. See, both of these, authority and power, are necessary to carry out the task assigned to anyone.

I mean, if a diplomat just goes off on his own, like Rudolf Hess did to try to work out a deal between Germany and England towards the beginning of the Second World War, and he had no authority to do that.

He ended up in prison. Or if you're a commercial guy, you've gone out, and you're sitting down in the room, and you're waggling over what might be the best contract, and finally it's agreed upon, and the guy says, Okay, let's sign the contract.

He says, Oh, well, you know what? I don't really have the authority to carry that out. I've got to send it back to New York. Now, we have been given a task that we have the authority to do it, and the power to do it.

[10 : 41] To carry out the assignment, we need that authority and power. We've been given both in the Great Commission and what we might call the Great Empowerment. Go make disciples. Go bear witness to Jesus.

Now, what I think is important is that, and I'm going to share in just a minute, that underneath this, when this was laid out as a vision for the church about how we go about doing business, there were certain things put underneath this category of mission that I think for some might say, Hmm, what are those doing there?

Let me read it. Activities under this sphere that we're talking about, this has to do with mission, local mission, community engagement, to know who's out there and to engage with the community around us.

Church planting, starting new churches, praying towards that end and so on. Also, international mission, indeed, facilitating communication with missionaries, supporting those who have gone to the ends of the earth to make the gospel known.

Also, to offer short-term mission, like you go for a couple of weeks somewhere and serve in a place that you've never been before and see what it's like to be out on the field. And, of course, there's a need for personal evangelism.

[11 : 52] We need to be equipped to know how to share the hope, give a reason for the hope that's in us. But there's also this partnership to identify and partner in Glasgow opportunities for service.

And then underneath that are listed three suggested entities. Preach All Trust, Street Connect, and Glasgow City Mission. Now, all three of those entities, at the end, all three of those entities seek to address such human needs as poverty, drug addiction, loneliness, marginalization.

Now, when we talk about the Great Commission and we talk about bearing witness to the ends of the earth, usually we're thinking about carrying the gospel message to persuade people that Jesus is indeed the Messiah, that they're sinners, they need to repent, they need to have the righteousness that Christ has accomplished for them because no other righteousness will do when we stand before God on the day of judgment.

But when we look at something like that last expectation that we would partner with entities that deal with such things as poverty, drug addiction, loneliness, marginalization, marginalization, it can land on our ears as kind of being out of place.

What has that got to do with the Great Commission? What has that got to do with being empowered to bear witness to Jesus? But if we think of the Great Commission or what I've dubbed the Great Empowerment only as securing people for heaven, then we've missed an important part of the assignment that's been given to us.

[13 : 23] And that's to make disciples. Now, Nate's going to be talking about disciples, so I'm not going to steal any of his thunder. But we are going to talk about what it means, in some respects, related to what I'm going to be talking about today, what it means to be a disciple.

For what are disciples but followers of Jesus? And who is Jesus but the one who teaches and shows us how human beings are meant to live? Now, if you recall, if you were here last Sunday night and I preached on doubt and I talked about how it was that John the Baptist was in prison and after all that he had done, after all he had said, he was in prison and he sent some of his disciples to Jesus to say, are you the one or should you be looking for another?

And the question was, why would he do that? But the evidence that Jesus gives to his disciples to send back to John to assure him that he is indeed the one is this, the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up and the poor have the good news preached to them.

Not one of those activities directly bear upon the eternal destiny of a person's soul. Not one of them. Receive sight, lame walk, lepers cleanse, unless we want to spiritualize all that, but Luke doesn't spiritualize.

Even when he talks about the poor getting the good news preached to them, for Luke, the poor are the poor. Not just poor in spirit, I mean, there is an aspect to that also in the scripture. When Luke talks about these things, these are people who are suffering the effects of a fallen world.

[14 : 58] So none of those activities that Jesus gives is evidence that indeed he is the one directly bears upon the eternal destiny of a soul. That, see, it's bearing witness to Jesus does not just mean, though it does mean, what he has done to obtain eternal life for those who repent of sin and believe.

Bearing witness to Jesus is also testifying that his presence foreshadows, anticipates the time when all things will be made new.

For the people dealing with the conditions that Jesus spoke of, their lives, here, now, physically, emotionally, relationally, they'll all be new, radically different because of their encounter with Jesus.

And our being made witnesses involves those kinds of activities as well and that's why those things are underneath the heading of mission. Now, I'm going to go down in a different direction for a bit and hopefully it won't feel like a rabbit trail.

I'll try to explain myself well so that there makes a connection because I think it does and brings us back to why it is that we're doing what we're doing when we talk about mission. Perhaps you've not heard this terminology.

[16 : 16] Have you ever heard the terminology the cultural mandate? The cultural mandate. And where that comes from is the passage that we read from Genesis. He says to them, what are they supposed to do?

They're supposed to go out and be fruitful and multiply, have dominion over the animals, subdue the earth, and then later when Adam is put into the garden, he's to tend and keep it or guard it.

And that's been called the cultural mandate. Now what's a mandate? It's very similar to a commission or a mission. It's an official order or commission to do something.

Human beings were given something to do when they were created. To be fruitful and multiply, fill the earth, subdue it, have dominion over the animals, tend to keep the garden. That mandate, that commission was given before there was any need of the great commission.

That was when human beings were in their pristine state, created in the image of God. They were to serve him by using the potentials of what he had made, creation, in a manner that reflected how the one who had made it had purposed for them to be used.

[17 : 26] See, to be accurate, when human beings were made, they were made as stewards. They didn't own a thing. They were granted to use the things that God had made and he expected them to use them in a way that would bring glory to him and blessing to all around.

They represented and served the owner of the garden, making sure he received the rightful expected return. And the fact that all human beings are made in that way, that means that all human beings are hardwired for this undertaking of creating culture, this assignment.

And it's evident all around us. Everything that human beings are involved in emanates from this initial, fundamental, foundational, inevitable, and unavoidable assignment.

And it's clear that human beings have been given that authority and power to carry it out because they've been at the business of fulfilling, filling the earth and subduing it from the dawn of our existence.

And the product, the outcome, of exercising that mandate, that commission, is what we call culture. Now normally when we talk about culture, we think like the arts, talk about music, but no, no, one way of talking about it, the Christian very succinctly puts it, he says, culture is what we make of the world.

[18 : 46] What we make of the world. So it has to do with how you raise your family, has to do with the machines you build, has to do with the books that you write, it has to do with the history that you pass on, the tradition that you cherish.

Everything that we are as human beings, everything that we generate and harness out of God's creation creates culture. It is the culture. Now suffice it to say that human beings have taken that calling, that mandate, that commission, and the authority and power to carry out and made a real hash of it.

Free, fruitful, and multiply, that certainly involves having children, but also creating other things, but human beings have the capacity to create life and the United States, at least the numbers I'm familiar with, between 1973 and 2019, there were 63.5 million abortions.

We talk about dominion over every living thing, over all the creatures, and do you know, again, back in the United States, in 1820, roaming out on what's called the Great Plains, this vast open space of the continent, there were some 30 to 50 million buffaloes, by 1900, there was 100.

In 80 years, they had wiped out nearly 50 million buffaloes, just for fun, most of it. Tend to keep the garden.

[20 : 20] Tend to keep the garden. Do you know, have you ever heard of the Great Pacific Garbage Patch? It's one of five large accumulations of ocean plastic. And it's located between Hawaii and California.

And a group estimates that the surface covers three times the size of France. Plastic out in the middle of the ocean. And then, of course, rule and authority that we've been given, meant to be a blessing.

Visualized in Psalm 72 as a king who reigns in righteousness and sin justice. But in the 20th century alone, between Stalin and Mao and Hitler, upwards of 65 million people either starved to death or killed because of the wars that they started.

See, human beings are busy about doing this stuff because they're made in the image of God and they're told they've got an assignment. Go out and do things. And yet, the fallenness of humanity attacked it and indeed, they've been doing things and doing things very badly.

And God will hold image bearers account for how they have carried out the assignment given to them. So, an additional way to look at the Great Commission and what I'm calling the Great Empowerment is bringing people back to the correct way to fulfill their God-given cultural mandate.

[21 : 43] See, think again about the Great Commission. What's the assignment? It's to make disciples. And what's a disciple? One who is baptized, taught to observe the teachings of Jesus.

That is, put it in another way, a disciple is restored in his or her relationship to their creator, no longer ostracized as Adam and Eve were after the fall, and they learn afresh or perhaps for the first time who they are and how they are to live all that Jesus had taught them.

Baptism represents that reconciliation. What Jesus' teaching represents is how we are supposed to live. can you hear the cultural mandate in that Great Commission?

Can you hear the fact that here we are as human beings hardwired to carry out an assignment that gave us, that God gave us, and we've made a mess of it. And so, those go out empowered by the Holy Spirit to carry out the assignment of the Great Commission, and what are they doing?

They're gathering people to restore their relationship with their creator and teaching them this is how you're supposed to live. This is how you're supposed to exercise authority. This is how you're supposed to relate to the creation around you.

[22 : 53] This is what you're supposed to do with your garbage. In the Great Commission, human beings made in the image of God are restored to a right relationship with God and in a similar way are instructed to be fruitful and multiply, fill the earth, and subdue it.

That's what's going on. When we go about God's creation preaching the good news, we're being fruitful, multiplying those who are in right relationship with God and teaching them to live as they were created to live, to take up the cultural mandate in a way that was intended to be fulfilled.

That's what evangelism is in some respects. It's restoring a fellow human being to their right relationship with God and themselves and their creation, their existential DNA now harnessed to bring glory to God and blessing to others.

You see, what the preaching of the gospel does is it shines light. It shines light. It exposes the brokenness of the world. It shines light into its dark corners.

And those who are brought to faith through its proclamation were given eyes to see where the task entrusted to human beings at the very beginning has been abused, neglected, exploited, causing damage to individuals, families, societies, and truth in all human endeavors.

[24 : 12] And so those brought to faith seek to address that failing by exercising proper stewardship over God's good creation with an eye toward bringing glory to God, blessing to others, just as the cultural mandate was intended to do.

So what I'm suggesting is that being fruitful in the area of missions includes supporting international missions, being equipped to explain the gospel to our friends and neighbors, but also to equip to carry out, model, and restore people to their true humanity, stewards of God's garden as they make something out of the world.

Now, in my opening definition, I said it typically involves travel, and typically it might. That's how we often think about missions in Christian circles. We think about people traveling from their native country to somewhere else to do the work of restoring people to their proper role in their cultural mandate.

But typical suggests not always. That is, the same work can be done right here, right here at home, right here in Scotland, Glasgow, in Partick. There are thousands, tens of thousands of people around us who are out of relationship with God, failing in their God-given mission every day.

And this failing is not benign. It affects their eternal destiny, and it affects how they treat those around them and the world in which they live. And the mission, the mission sphere acknowledges that reality.

[25 : 44] Again, consider the organizations that we are seeking to partner with. People dealing with poverty, poverty, and drug addiction, disempowerment.

Thinking this way opens up a whole host of activities that seek to invite, model, experience, critique what we make of the world. One's closing idea.

What's important to note in all of those times when these assignments were given, whether it's in the garden or whether it's in Galilee when Jesus appears to them or as they're waiting in Jerusalem.

It was not to one person. It was always to more than one. And that's why it's important when we think about this idea of mission is that we think about it as a church.

God supplies a church with various gifts, various people that are capable of doing these kinds of things. God calls each of us indeed to be willing and ready to give a hope that's within us, but all of those assignments were given when there was more than one person present.

[26 : 52] And I think that signals something. More than one person included. In the creation account, both the man and the woman are tasked. In the Great Commission, all the apostles are tasked.

And so our pursuing this assignment as a body of believers is really vitally important. It doesn't exclude us learning how and indeed to best share the reason for the hope that's in it, but we are looking to see how might we do this together.

Colin preached on worship last week and perhaps you're aware of this quote from John Piper, wrote a book called Let the Nations Be Glad.

And I think it's important and ties back to what Colin was talking about in worship last week. You see, we've been given this task to go out and to make the gospel known, to restore people, to right relationship with God, to show them how it is that they're supposed to live so they can actually live as human beings who are created to live.

He said, missions is not, however, the ultimate goal of the church. Worship is. Missions exists because worship doesn't.

[28 : 06] Worship is ultimate, not missions, because God is ultimate, not man. When this age is over and the countless millions of the redeemed fall on their faces before the throne of God, missions will be no more.

It is a temporary necessity, but worship abides forever. Yeah? So we are creating, bringing people back into a right relationship with God.

They're being instructed on how they're supposed to live. And what we can hope is that those people that Jesus healed and caused them to see again, got them to get up and walk, the hope that we have is that they saw who this Jesus was and what he was doing and how it radically changed the picture of their existence.

And because of that, they indeed humbled themselves and followed him. And that's what we hope when we engage in this kind of activity, both in the direct preaching, explicit preaching of the gospel, but also in other ways in which we show people Jesus, the kingdom has come.

There is a better way. There is a hope set before us that is not rife with all of this brokenness. And when that time comes, there will be no more missions.

[29 : 16] But between now and then, as Piper says, missions is a necessity. Because as we go out and bring the gospel to the worlds that surround us, we are indeed bringing people into a relationship with God who will then bow down and worship him.

Worship is indeed ultimate because God is ultimate. So, the title of this sermon was Made for Mission. What I'm suggesting, it's just in our DNA.

That's who we are. We exist to be given assignments and to do them. And it comes with being human. And now as Christians, it comes with being Christian. We make Jesus known because it's in and through him that people themselves will also discover who they are and who God is and what he's asked of them.

Let's pray. Gracious God, we thank you that you have created us to serve, created us to do what you tell us to do. That's how we've been created.

And we ask your forgiveness for all the ways in which we want to deny that, rebel against it, manifest it in the things that we say and do. And we pray for the world around us, God, who is working so hard to deny that reality, who is striving to be autonomous, striving to create their own existence, to define what a human being is.

[30 : 37] And you have told us who we are. We're image bearers of you. And we've been created to do what you've told us to do. And it's in that that we'll find our blessing.

So I pray you give us hearts for those around us, for those who have suffered at the hands of the brokenness of this world, who have suffered because of the sinful exploitation of others, but also at the same time, even as we help them, even as we help them, Lord, that there will be that awakening within them that will desire the God who is and that they will worship and join us in worshiping the one who has promised that indeed there is hope, there is redemption, there is life, liberty, freedom.

And so, God, we commit ourselves to the mission that you've given us to make the gospel known, to treat your, to live in the world as you called us to live, and that we might be faithful in that by your power, exercising the authority you've given us all to your glory.

In Jesus' name. Amen. Amen.