

The Missionary Vision

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Preacher: John Thew

[0 : 00] Please sit down. Thank you. May I say first of all thank you for your welcome to this church.

It's lovely to be here. We've heard the name of this church. It's fairly famous in circles around the world. Yes it is. You are. Wow. And it's good to be here and to share with you.

Catherine and I are really delighted to see the way all of the buildings integrate together. And that's really exciting. We dream about that sort of thing. And here it is.

But let me remind you they're just buildings. But it's a picture and it's a good picture of the actual integration that has to happen. That does happen between God's people here, there and everywhere all over the world.

And so there as you look around this place let that be a parable to you really. Of the way this local church integrates into God's purposes all over the world.

[1 : 09] And it's in that sort of area I do want to talk. As I say thank you, I want to say thank you too for your partnership in the gospel through Church Missionary Society over many years.

I see out on your board there the Reeds and the Graze Glovers and the Mitchells. The Mitchells, yes. We've been visited all of those people. And it's exciting to see the way that they have been sent out from churches like this one.

The way they are supported in the ministries that they're doing. And the very work that they are involved in. It's exciting to see our involvement in God's worldwide mission.

In the readings that we had today. The one theme that permeates them is declaring the praises of God. And that's what I want to pick up on.

Declaring the praises of God. What I want to say today, if you go to sleep in two minutes time that's fine. So I'll tell you right now what it is. You've got two minutes with me. What I want to say today is that what we do here in the local church.

[2 : 21] Is not have a happy club. I mean it is happy and it is nice and it is clubby in a way. And that's good. But we're not here to be a happy club. We are here as a church to declare the praises of God.

And to integrate with the rest of the world and God's people. To declare God's praises worldwide. We are part of a big jigsaw puzzle.

That God has put together and continues to put together. So that God's name is known for what it is. So that God's character is understood for who he is.

The idea of the two burning passions of God. Are that God wants people to know of his grace and his love. God wants people to know how glorious he really is.

Because the truth of that is what saves. The truth of that is really what gives us hope in a world that's otherwise disastrously hopeless. Quite frankly. So God's burning passion is that we here in this church and with all of God's people all over the world.

[3 : 29] Work together to make his name famous. So that people know the true character of the God who loves people and saves. And then his passion really is that in doing that we share the word of God.

And that's how we show his glory. We declare by one means and another that God is the God who loves people. God is the God who's got great plans and purposes.

Not just for your lives and mine. But for people of the whole world. Those who will turn to him. So our role in all of this. Our role is to be part of God's big purposes.

So that he is truly known. And then people have a genuine opportunity to make an informed choice. To follow God. Or if they're brave enough.

To stand against him. That's the two minutes worth. Okay. In the last. The last.

[4 : 30] I'm the federal secretary of Church Missionary Society. That means that I'm sort of the figurehead boss of the organization. It's the branches like your Victorian branch that works with local churches.

Raising up missionaries. It's you guys who actually do the groundwork. CMS doesn't prepare people as missionaries. It's you, the church, who prepares them. Gives them their foundational stuff.

So they've grown up through the Sunday school and whatever else. They've grown up to know and love the Lord. Our role really is to do a bit of value adding. You know, we add on the bits and pieces that will equip them to move into other cultures.

That's those who are, you know, able to do that. Some of us will never be able to do that. But all of us are involved in the support base. And also that, you know, that foundational growing base. But it's the Victorian branch for this area and the other ones all over the place who raise up missionaries and then raise up the support that keeps missionaries at work in God's worldwide purposes.

[5 : 34] In the federal office, my role with the federal staff, my role is to accept the missionaries, to make sure that they're well trained and then to send them off to the four corners of the world and then to spend the money, of course.

So we send the people, spend the money. That's a happy arrangement from us, from our side. And we think it's a happy arrangement from the branch's side too. But that's roughly where we go.

Catherine and I and our three children were in Pakistan during the 70s and 80s as CMS missionaries.

We spent years in Karachi and then we went up into Interior Sindh with a D. And we spent years working with the majority population of Pakistan and then with the minority outcast Hindu peoples as well.

And during that time, we had really a hard, marvellous experience, a hard, marvellous life. We've come back to Australia years ago and we've spent nine years working with refugees and new speakers of English in Wollongong outside of Sydney.

And that was a joy. We thought we were heading back to Pakistan, but we got sidetracked. We still think we'd like to go back to Pakistan every week, we think that. And maybe it will come true one day.

[6 : 52] But for the meantime, we're in the federal office and facilitating a whole lot of things that go on. Let me tell you a little inside story just to set the scene.

In the last, I don't know, number of months, we've been looking for a new database in CMS. Now, that'll turn some people on and others, you know, it's very ho-hum.

But a database really is to be able to keep track of all the things that we do and to try and integrate them together. We've got a few problems in CMS. One is that we've got 16,000 members.

Your leaflet says up to, no, more than 10,000. And 16,000 is more than 10,000. You'll be happy to know. So we've got about 16,000 people who are members and supporters of CMS.

That's a lot of people. And keeping track of those and being able to help provide the needs of those members is really a big job in itself.

[7 : 50] Tracking where things are at, tracking what local churches, link churches need, keeping track of all the links that go on and so on. All of that is a big need. We've been looking for a database that will handle that sort of very complex stuff.

More than that, though, we've been looking for a database that will handle our 180 missionaries that continue to grow in number. They're placed in 32 countries. We work simultaneously in 14 different currencies in the world and trying to handle all of that complexity as well.

We have 60 or so partner churches and agencies over the world that we relate to. And keeping them happy and sweet and keeping our lines of communication open and keeping our information up to date is part of the database job.

There are 50 or more missionary agencies. Now, that was just a plug number. I couldn't work out how many, but in 10 seconds I counted 50 and I thought that was a good number. We have 50 other missionary agencies that we relate to very closely and some of those we actively co-work with.

All of the others we talk to and we swap information. So keeping track of them. There are 300 at least leaders of mission projects and departments internationally that we have to keep up with.

[9 : 08] And there are 250 or more leaders in mission thinking. That is, people who are academics and other thinkers that we have to try and keep up with.

Now, that, in a big database, that is a lot of information and a lot of to-ing and fro-ing and a lot of updating that we need to do to keep on top of it all. We've been looking for one database that will do all of that.

That will help us to keep on top of the myriads of information that keep pouring in. Well, we contacted a few companies and we looked at a few products. And one of them appealed to us. We'd heard good reports about this database package. And so we invited the company to send a representative. And the man came and he sat us down and he spent a day with us introducing his company and his database.

And let me say frankly, the presentation that he gave was miserable. It was disgraceful. He didn't know the facts about the database. He was, you know, his presentation was obvious to us, or it certainly appeared to be unpractised.

[10 : 16] His equipment malfunctioned. A bit like some, you know, missionary slideshows that used to happen in the past, of course. But his equipment malfunctioned.

And when we asked him plain and basic questions, he did not know the answer to some of them. And it was a miserable presentation. In terms of representing his company, it was poor.

Frankly, it was very poor. I don't know that if his boss had been sitting there, I don't know that he would still have the job. I don't know whether he has. The capacity of the database itself, he didn't give us any clue about what it could do.

We have subsequently learned that it's everything we need. But he sure didn't tell us. And we were bitterly disappointed and went very close not to buying the product.

Because his presentation was crummy. It was awful. He didn't represent the company. He didn't represent the product. And he did a lousy job.

[11 : 19] Now, why did I tell you that? Because in the Christian life and in God's good economy, God chooses churches like this one and people like you and me to represent him.

And to be the presenters of his good name and good character and good works to the world. That's a scary business. I look around the church that I'm a member of and I think, Crumbs, are we the people that have got to represent the name of God?

You can look sideways if you like, if you're game. But you know what I'm talking about. God chooses ordinary people like you and me. And he says, you are the people living in the world.

Yes, you are the people with whom I trust my name. You are the people who represent me to the world. It's on your life and your words that many people in the world will make their decision about whether they buy God, the product and God's product.

Whether they will liaise with God. Whether they will accept the message of salvation that comes through the word of God. It's on our witness that so much depends.

[12 : 38] Now, that's scary stuff. And I don't know why God chose to work that way. If I was talking to God frankly, I'd probably say to him, God, look, you better think of another way. This is highly dangerous stuff.

I know what people are like. I'm one of them. Trust me, I know. But God didn't consult me on that. And he did choose to go that way for an incredible reason of grace.

God has chosen people like you and me. And he entrusts his name, his reputation, his message of eternal life to people like us, to churches like us all over the world.

And it's at our representation that people will choose or reject. Very often, it's because of our representation that people will choose or reject the very message of God.

Fortunately, God puts his spirit into people. And it's at God's prompting that people will even go beyond our words and our witness. Fortunately, sometimes.

[13 : 46] God is not limited by that. But he has given us an enormous task. An enormous responsibility to represent him truly and well. Now, in the readings that we had, in 1 Peter, chapter 2 and verse 9, it says, You, that is, scattered Christians all over the Mediterranean world it was, as Peter wrote, but it's you, we, are to declare the praises of him who called us out of darkness into his marvellous light.

That is the purpose for our being. That's why God has called us. If indeed God has called you to his family and into salvation, that's why he's called you.

So that our very lives and our words, everything we are, will declare the praises of him who called us out of darkness into his marvellous light.

Now, that presupposes something, of course. It presupposes that God has done a work in your life, that he has drawn you out of darkness into light. It presupposes that you have a story to tell, that you have a testimony.

It presupposes that God has been at work in your heart and life. If indeed he has, you will know that. If you're not sure about it, but you have any inkling towards God, anything in your heart that says, seek God, any questions that you want to ask God, let me say, it's God who puts those into your mind.

[15:12] And that is an absolute sure sign that God is at work in your life now. That is even prompting you to ask the question and to find out.

When Peter says you are to declare the praises of God, that we are to, it requires really that we represent God well and properly.

We're to declare by the way we live, by the words we speak, by the attitudes that we have, by the way we invest our time and our talents and our goods in this world.

We are to declare that God is praiseworthy, worthy of praise. And we're to declare the character of God by all of those things so that people can see in us, as indeed in all God's people, people can see in us the very character of God reflected.

We're to be really, I suppose, salespeople for God. Now, let me say that some of us have gifts that will make us... Do you want me to just...

[16:17] I'll shout. Some of us, of course, have great gifts to be salespeople. Some are natural, you know, spruikers and others are not.

And God has given us different gifts so that we can use those gifts together. I mean, that's the way it is. He gives us gifts so we can put them together and actually produce a complete package.

So when I say that we are representatives of God, I'm not saying necessarily that we all have to be the upfront salesmen, the upfront speakers. But I am saying we have to know enough of the living God in our own lives so that we can answer the questions that are asked of us.

And if we don't know the answer, we know enough to be able to ask somebody else. We know where to find that basic information. That's what God entrusts us with as the worldwide people of God, to be representatives of God.

Peter goes on to say that once you were not God's people, now you are God's people. That presumes, again, the work of God. And it alludes back to the Old Testament story of Hosea.

[17:30] Maybe, maybe you're not familiar with the Old Testament story of Hosea. Let me whet your appetite to go back into the Old Testament and read the story of Hosea.

It's a little book under his name. Go back and read it. And there you will see an incredible story of how a family of really little consequence went through terrible agonies and troubles.

And Mrs. Hosea left home and ended up in the gutters. And the incredible story of how, as a nobody, God sent his person, who happened to be her own husband, God sent his person to go back and at his own expense, purchase her back into the family.

And she who had been a nobody had become again God's body, God's person. And Peter quotes that. Peter picks that up and he says, Now, in the whole section, the whole section of 1 Peter 2, verses 9 to 12 that we read, Peter is actually quoting from the book of Exodus.

He's taking it unashamedly from there and moving it over and saying, As it was, so it is. He's picking up the Exodus 19, which is a fascinating piece of history and a fascinating story, sometimes passed over in our readings too easily.

[19:15] What we've got there is a picture of God at work and his people saving. We know Abraham and his people lived. God called them and gave them a land to live in.

There was great drought and hardship. They ended up down in Egypt. This is putting hundreds of years of history together very quickly. They ended up in Egypt. They were guests in Egypt for some time.

They earned their keep, as it were. They did well there. And after a number of years, quite a long time in fact, there was a change of government.

There were changes of policy. And they found themselves discriminated against as foreigners. People who had been welcomed, then excluded.

And they found themselves indeed in the position of being slaves. And God saw and heard and understood the anguish that they were going through. And in Exodus 19, we come to the end point of that, where God has actually responded to the need of the people.

[20 : 17] And he sent his savior Moses. And Moses led them out. You know, the ten plagues and all of the marvelous displays of God's power that was there. And through all of that, God led his people out and rescued them through the Red Sea, brought them through the desert.

They arrive at Mount Sinai. And there, God meets with them. And he says, now, brothers and sisters, let me tell you why I've done it. You've seen what I've done. You've got a testimony. You know that you've been picked up, rescued. And here you are right before me. Let me tell you exactly why. And in Exodus 19, we're told three reasons.

God chose these people to be his precious, treasured possessions. This is talking about them. Peter picks it up to talk about us.

He quotes exactly those words. We have been chosen to be God's special, treasured possessions. That's not locked in the vault, but out on display, showing the character of the one who chose and protected by the one who chose.

[21 : 26] We've been chosen also to be God's kingdom of priests. King, priests. The king had his priests in those days. And the priests were the interface with the people and the king.

They were the ones who connected the king with the people, the people with the king. So that if, for instance, you wanted to see the king, you would approach the priest. The priest would prepare you, bring you, introduce you to the king so that you could have an audience.

Or if the king wanted to talk to you, he would send the priest out to bring you, to prepare you, to bring you in and present you to himself. And the priest was the one who did the bidding of the king and represented the king and indeed had the power and authority of the king to be that introducer. That was his, her role. Peter picks it up. It's said in Exodus before that. It's said in Exodus before that. We are God's royal priesthood. The ones that God trusts his work in the world with.

The ones that represent the name and the authority and the power and the glory of the king himself. The third reason that God tells in Exodus 19 that Peter then picks up.

[22 : 42] The third reason that God has chosen us is to be God's holy nation. The word holy, sadly, is mistakenly used or thought of many times as, you know, to do with with stained glass windows and sort of religious stuff.

It's really nothing to do with that at all. It's to do with being set aside for a particular purpose. And so really, you say, what what does God set himself aside for?

What is his particular purpose? What's the holiness of God? And the answer is God's holiness is that every person in the world will know his grace and glory, that everyone will know that he's a God who loves and a God who has given the life of his own son so that you and I can be his family, part of his saved people.

And when God says you are my holy nation, he's really saying your heartbeat will be my heartbeat. My heartbeat will be yours.

You are to dedicate yourself to the glory of God in such a way as I have, says the living God. You are to have hearts that beat with God's heart.

[23 : 55] A passion for people like God has. So God has chosen at Mount Sinai, he says, I've chosen and saved you for this very purpose, to be my people in all the world.

Peter picks it up, applies it to us and says, this is why God continues to choose people like you and me. The context in which he says all that then is the context of the world.

And this is incredibly important. Twice in Exodus, he says, though the whole world is mine. So in that context of the world. And secondly, he says, in the sight of all the nations.

And what he's really saying to us there, what he's really saying is that the context of God's activity and grace and glory is the world. Yeah, right.

It's in the line, isn't it?

[24 : 59] I don't know. Oh, yeah. I'm in for a transfer. Drink to that.

The gremlins at work. I mean, that's always the way, isn't it? There you go. Can I start again now? Right. Where did we get to? Yes. We're talking about the all-important business of the context of the world.

God has chosen us. Treasured possessions. Yes. The interface with the world. The priests. The king's priests. And the holy nation with a heartbeat that beats with the very heart of God.

With the same passion as God has. All of that. And the context is the world. Let me put that in its context. What it's really saying to us is that God's purposes are worldwide. God plans that his glory be known to all peoples. 6.3 billion. If you start counting now, you'll die long before you get halfway.

[26 : 16] Any of you. A huge, a huge enterprise. But God's plan is for people. The world. And we are part of that. Now, let me put all this together.

Here is the Church of Holy Trinity, Doncaster. You've got on the board a number of missionaries. Some through CMS and other organizations. You've got missionaries there. And you are, through them, extending your touch to the world.

Because you maintain those people. First of all, you prepare them. You promote them. You send them. And then you maintain them. Because you do all of that, your ministry and work and life here in this small corner of God's world is actually extended worldwide so that your touch on the world, your partnership in God's worldwide plans in the context that he's talked about, is actually tangible. You are doing world mission by raising up kids in Sunday school who know and love the Lord Jesus, by nurturing them through kids clubs and youth groups, by having Bible study groups that educate people about the glory and the love and the wonder of God's grace, by putting together money and everything else that's needed to maintain the support for people that you send, by choosing out people and preparing them and promoting them so that they can go as our representatives into all the world.

That partnership is what God is talking about. That's the context of all that God is talking about. Let me encourage you, church. Let me encourage you greatly that the work of everyday Christian and home church life is part of God's world mission.

[28 : 04] If only you can see it. See it. Open your eyes and see it. What you do in the Sunday school class, what you do in a personal mentoring situation or a discipling situation with somebody can have worldwide implications.

And you see that larger context all the time. Keep that in view. Some of us will never get to the mission field. We know that. Some of us should never go to the mission field.

We know that too. God gives particular gifts for particular people. But there are some here and some of your contacts that God will touch and raise up.

And you need to be privy to that and push those people on and challenge them and help them to see God's bigger context and support them. Kick them in the shins when they need it.

And support them again and be there to keep supporting them so that they, on our behalf, can be doing the wider work in God's world and God's theatre of making the glory of God known to all.

[29 : 11] That's the bigger picture. Well, we're involved in it. We're part of it. Peter writes to us, as we read in Exodus as well, but Peter writes to us who are scattered all over the world.

He says we're God's chosen people. We're part of God's great plan of being the interface with the world. God's sales people, sometimes with the gift of the gab, but certainly God's representatives. We are his holy people with the same heartbeat as God. And playing our individual parts, whatever that is, whatever that is, in God's much larger context.

Peter goes on to quickly say, therefore, the way you live is so important. And he talks about us living as refugees in the world. He's really saying, you know, the things of this world, don't cling to them.

They'll pass away. And if they don't, you will. You will anyway. So don't hang on to them. Hold on to the things that will last for eternity. Live lives that are loose to the world so that you can be strong to Christ.

[30 : 18] Be involved in the bigger picture so that even if people accuse you of being stupid, dumb, crazy or wicked, those things will just wash off and the glory of God will shine through so that your good works, the way you live your lives, will actually point to the glory of God in everything you do.

I've got nothing more to say. So I'll stop. Heavenly Father, we pray, help us to pick up that big vision, that big picture of what you are doing in the world.

Help us, we pray, Lord, to gather information. And that's what I should have added in, shouldn't I? Yes, about getting information through being a member. We pray, help us to gather information so we can see day by day and pray day by day about what you are doing in the world.

Keep us up to date. Help us to work hard on that and to play our part, whatever that is, to play our part in your worldwide mission. Lord, we thank you and bless you that you are a God who cares and

loves and saves.

We thank you for the work you've done in our lives. We pray that you'll help us to further that work in other people's lives as long as we draw breath. For Jesus' sake we pray.

[31 : 34] Amen.