

Missional Reflections on John 5

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[0 : 00] Well, it's a real privilege to be with you this morning. Thank you very much indeed to the leadership for the invitation to bring God's Word. As you've heard, I'm the International Director Emeritus of Operation Mobilization.

It's a wonderful title with absolutely no responsibility whatsoever. So I just spend my life traveling around the world, preaching and teaching, and doing a little bit of writing as I go.

And I've been asked to reflect with you this morning on the passage which was expounded a week ago, those verses which have just been read to you from John's Gospel, Chapter 5.

And we're going to reflect again on those verses, but look at them from a missional standpoint, quite specifically. C.S. Lewis famously wrote, A man who was merely a man and said the sorts of things Jesus said wouldn't be a great moral teacher.

He'd either be a lunatic on a level with a man who says he's a poached egg, or else he'd be the devil of hell. You must make your choice.

[1 : 07] Either this man was and is the Son of God, or else a madman or something worse. But don't let us come up with any patronizing nonsense about his being a great human teacher.

He hasn't left that open to us, and he didn't intend to. So using the words of C.S. Lewis, let's look at this passage and look at the sorts of things Jesus said about himself.

If your Bible is open, look at verse 24. This is one thing Jesus said. Whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be judged.

He's crossed over from death to life. Look at the next verse. A time is coming and has now come. This time has come in Jesus, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God, and those who hear will live.

What about the next verse? As the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son also to have life in himself.

[2 : 23] And what about the next verse? He has given him, the Son, the Lord Jesus, authority to judge because he is the Son of Man. And finally, verse 28.

Most remarkable statement of all, possibly. A time is coming when all who are in the graves will hear his voice.

Christian mission, and indeed the Christian gospel, depends entirely on the person of Jesus Christ. If he was, as some believe he is, a great moral philosopher, then we are a group of people this morning who have some healthy advice to pass on to our fellow men and women.

And if they apply that healthy advice to their lives, then they might experience a better life to a certain degree. But if he was, and if he is, the Son of God, the second person of the Holy Trinity, who came to earth to rescue fallen humanity, then we don't have advice to give.

[3 : 35] We have an announcement to make. We need to be declaring, proclaiming, teaching, God has intervened.

He hasn't abandoned his creation. He has himself, in the person of his Son, come to redeem this broken, suffering world.

If this is the truth, then it's not something like advice, which we may choose or choose not to pass on to others, and they may choose to receive it or not to receive it.

No, this is an announcement we must make. It's urgent. It's essential. And to fail to make this announcement would be to fail the one who has done such extraordinary things for us.

And it would also be to fail our fellow man. Now, it was the relationship of the person of Christ to God the Father, which was really bothering the Jewish leaders here in John chapter 5.

[4 : 51] The fifth chapter begins with the healing of the man at the pool of Bethesda. He'd been an invalid for 38 years and is miraculously healed.

The response of the Jewish leaders is totally amazing. Jesus had told the man to pick up his mat and walk. Do the leaders, the religious leaders, enter into his joy?

Not a bit of it. They're more concerned about the mat than they are about the man. Verse 10, the Jewish leaders said to the man who'd been healed, it is the Sabbath, and the law forbids you to carry your mat.

How can religious leaders get into such a state? Well, I haven't time to go into it. But they'd become more concerned about maintaining religious systems and probably their own positions, their own status within those systems, more concerned about that than the mission of God.

Do you know that's still possible? I realized after I'd been an executive leader in Operation Mobilization for a number of years that exactly that had happened to me.

[6 : 15] I was going from one meeting to the next, carrying a rather large briefcase with me, doing mission society things.

And I was no longer concerned about bringing the blessing of God to people. I was consumed with maintaining and developing the missionary organization, but neglecting the mission of God to be a blessing to the people of the world.

Well, the leaders find out that it was Jesus who healed this man on the Sabbath. And as you can see in verse 16, persecution begins.

And as Jesus defends himself, the issue becomes much, much bigger than breaking Sabbath laws. Verse 18, he was even calling God his own father, making himself equal with God.

That's their accusation. Does Jesus back off at that point? Any attempt to get himself out of the trouble which is clearly coming his way?

[7 : 24] No, not at all. It's then that he makes these astonishing claims that we've just read in verses 24 to 28.

The whole mission of God, the whole gospel of God, depends on the person of Jesus Christ. So let's look at the two specific claims which Jesus makes on this occasion.

First of all, he presents himself as the life giver. He clearly claims to offer life after death, resurrection life.

That's what we saw in verse 28. A time is coming when all who are in their graves will hear his voice and will come out.

In chapter 11, John will record an amazing example of this power. You'll be familiar with the incident. Jesus stands in front of the tomb of his friend Lazarus.

[8 : 31] The body of his friend had been in the grave for four days. Four days is significant. Jewish custom led to the belief that the spirit continued to hover over the body for three days, seeking to re-enter the body.

So this is after four days. Lazarus is really, truly dead by every definition. But Lazarus hears the life-giving voice of Jesus Christ.

Lazarus, come out. And John tells us, the dead man came out, his hands, his feet wrapped with strips of linen and a cloth around his face.

That life-giving voice will speak again at the end of time. And all who in their graves will hear it.

But this life-giving voice is being heard right now. in the world. Look at verse 24. Whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has now eternal life.

[9 : 50] Eternal life is available today to all who respond to the voice of Jesus. He said, I am the life. I am the way. I am the truth.

He also said later in John's gospel that he is the only way to life. No one comes to the Father, to God, but through me.

Before going to the tomb of Lazarus, Jesus spoke to his sister Martha, I am the resurrection and the life.

The one who believes me will live here and now, even though they die. and whoever lives by believing in me will never die.

So how is this life-giving voice of Jesus heard in the world today? It's only heard as we, the people of God, make known the message of the written word.

[10 : 54] There are, of course, some wonderful testimonies heard most frequently from the Muslim world of the Lord Jesus appearing to people who don't have the word of God available to them.

The Lord Jesus appears to them in visions and in dreams, and for some, such visitations have been crucial to their salvation.

salvation. But the vast majority of people who come to faith in Jesus today come as people like you and people like me, bring the good news contained in the Bible.

And even for those for whom vision and dream has been important, that vision, that dream, has often just stimulated them to look out someone who has the word of God and have that word explained.

So next time you watch television, for example, think about this. The signal through which you are watching the picture and listening to the words comes from another place.

[12:06] But without the TV, you would never see, you would never hear. And that's the reality of mission in the world. The voice of the Son of God is sound sounding out in the world.

But people will hear that voice through you, through me. And I'm here this morning to tell you that although the risen Lord Jesus commissioned his people to take this life-giving news to all peoples in the world, and although he issued that command more than 2,000 years ago, the task is far from complete.

The following countries have less than one quarter of one percent of their population who are evangelical Christians. Less than one quarter of one percent of the population of these nations. Turkey, Yemen, Tunisia, Morocco, Afghanistan, Turkmenistan, Somalia, Montenegro, Bosnia, Mauritania, Maldives, Slovenia, Palestine, Tajikistan, Syria, Niger, Djibouti, Iran, Iraq, the Comoros, Senegal, Azerbaijan.

According to the Joshua Project, 1.4 billion people live in people groups where there are very, very few believers.

[13:46] Don't imagine for a moment that these spiritually dark countries are in the dark continent of Africa or in the Muslim world, only in these places.

If you look at the top 25 nations, when it comes to the slowest growing or fastest declining Christian populations, nine of the 25 are nations on my continent, the continent of Europe.

I was in Denmark recently where the vast majority of the population still make a contribution through a tax from their wages to the state Lutheran church, and they probably be defined in any census as Christian.

But as I was walking to preach in church with my host, I said, how many in your nation will be worshipping God in a church building this morning? He said, less than 2% of the country.

Nominalism, liberalism, is the curse of the European church. We bring the life-giving good news of Jesus to people.

[15:05] It's our great privilege, it's our great responsibility. So, brothers and sisters, how much of your time, how much of your money is committed to more people hearing this life-giving message?

That's the first thing Jesus said. I am the life giver. Look at the second thing Jesus says about himself. He presents himself as the judge of all people.

He, that is the Father, verse 25, has given him, the Son, authority to judge because he is the Son of Man.

Just look back to verse 22. The Father judges no one, but has entrusted all judgment to the Son. His Jewish hearers believed in a coming judgment, but they were convinced they would stand before God the Father on the last day.

But Jesus says, the Father will execute or exercise, sorry, his prerogative of judging through me.

[16:23] Paul, preaching in Athens says, for he, God, has set a day when he will judge the world with justice by the man he has appointed.

He has given proof of this to everyone by raising him from the dead. this is another amazing statement of the glory of Jesus the Son.

He's not just a great human being offering advice to other human beings. He is the one who on the last day will judge all other human beings.

God says, but there's an astounding claim in verse 24. Jesus says, if you hear my life-giving word and believe him who sent me, that is, trust in God, and believe in his word, you will not be condemned.

You'll cross over from death to life. That's the good news. Jesus gives life today and that life is eternal.

[17:30] we cross over from death, that is separation from God, we cross over from that to life, that is relationship with God, now and forever.

The question is, how can we keep such good news to ourselves? We must get out there amongst the people of Vancouver, amongst the people of Bangladesh, or wherever God may call you in the world.

we must get out there and be good news and communicate this life giving message of Jesus.

Tragically, of course, the world by and large does not see us or our message as good news.

A few years ago, some militant atheists paid for large advertisements to be placed on many buses traveling through London. women. Very interesting to see the wording of their adverts.

I'll give it you word for word. These big adverts says, there's probably no God. Now stop worrying and enjoy life.

[18 : 46] They felt they couldn't say, there is no God, because they might be prosecuted for advertising something they couldn't prove. believe. But do you see their message?

If there is a God, that means you're going to spend your time worrying. If there isn't, just sink back in your bus seat and relax.

It's assumed that if there is a God, that's something to worry about. He's a killjoy. He's out to get you. In October 2011, the American apologist William Lane Craig arranged a debate with Dawkins at the Sheldonian Theater in Oxford that Dawkins withdrew at the last minute.

The organizers put posters on buses going through Oxford with the following statement. There's probably no Dawkins. But stop worrying and come to the theater on the 25th and enjoy the evening.

We must get out this message. The existence of God is great news because even though sin has separated us from him, God has come to us on this gracious rescue mission in the person of his son to redeem us and his creation.

[20 : 21] There's a wonderful future for us and for this creation. We must get out there, we must live out this truth, and we must speak out this truth.

And the plan of God is that all peoples on earth will hear this news, and that the response will ultimately be from every tribe, every tongue, every nation.

That actually means every ethnic group on earth. So I ask you again, and I ask myself, how much time, how much money, am I committing from the resources that I have to ensure that people hear this eternal life-giving word?

But can I bring a second question to you? Is at least some of your time and some of your money committed to ensure that those who've never heard might at least have the opportunity?

A huge percentage of money going to mission around the world today goes to countries, to nations where the church is strong and established.

[21 : 45] We need a change of focus, at least to some degree, in the giving of our time and our money. It's time to concentrate on these people groups who've never had the opportunity to hear this life-giving news, the opportunity to be faced with the person of Jesus, the foundation of our gospel, the reason for our mission, the life giver and the judge of all men, to whom be glory forever.

Amen.