

LOCAL & GLOBAL IMPACT

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- [0 : 0 0] Gracious Father, we thank you for the work that you have done through the Lord Jesus Christ coming into this world, dying on the cross, rising again, dealing with the sin that separates us from you and that you, through the Lord Jesus, reconciled us to yourself.
- We thank you for your work in sending your spirit into our hearts, illuminating our darkness so that we could see the glory of Christ.
- Father, we pray that your work of drawing people to yourself would be our work, that we would be committed to that, it would be our focus, that we'd have a razor-sharp focus on your mission to draw people to yourself.
- Lord, we pray that you would continue to reform our heart, our structures, our practices, everything we do, so that our agenda might be aligned with yours. And we ask it for your glory. Amen.
- Chris Jones used an illustration some time ago. I thought it was a great one, so I decided to steal it and redo it. It's one of those illustrations that I think you shouldn't just tell once.
- [1 : 1 0] It's called The Parable of the Lighthouse, The Lifehouse, Life-Saving Station. Parable of the Life-Saving Station. It goes, Now the Life-Saving Station became a popular gathering plant.
- happy that the building was so crude and so poorly equipped. They felt the more comfortable place should be provided as the first refuge of those saved from the sea. They replaced the emergency stretchers with beds and put better furniture in the enlarged building. Now the life-saving station became a popular gathering place for its members and they redecorated it beautifully and furnished it sort of like a club. Less of the members were now interested in going to sea on life-saving missions and so they hired lifeboats crews to do that work for them. The mission of life-saving was still given lip service but most were too busy or lacked the necessary commitment to take part in life-saving activities personally. At the next meeting there was a split in the club membership.
- Most of the members wanted to stop the club's life-saving activities as being unpleasant and a hindrance to the normal pattern of club life. Some members insisted that life-saving was their primary purpose and pointed out that in fact they were still called a life-saving station but they were finally voted down and told that if they wanted to save the life of all various kinds of people who were shipwrecked on their shores they could begin their own life-saving station just down the coast and so they did. As the years went by the new station experienced the same changes that occurred with the old. They evolved into a club and yet another life-saving station was found and if you visit the seacoast today you will find a number of exclusive clubs along the shore.
- Shipwrecks are frequent in the waters but now most of the people don't get rescued. It's not hard to lose sight of your original purpose. A multitude of little decisions, even good decisions, for right reasons, if not put within a greater context of greater purpose, you can lead you down to a different path than was originally intended.

And this parable is a parable of the church on mission. It's easy for a church to lose its original purpose. It's easy for a church commissioned by the Lord Jesus to make disciples of all nations to lose sight of its purpose. And this brings us to our core value here at St. Paul's.

[4 : 27] Like all our core values, our core value of local and global impact, that is global impact and local impact for the gospel, is to shape our behaviour, our attitude, our structures, our practices.

That is, it needs to be explicit that God's agenda is our agenda as a church. So we're going to take a few moments just to see what God's agenda is, just very broadly, very briefly. So far in this commitment series, in the first four sermons I used Isaiah for three of them and so now we're going to make it four out of five. It's a great book. The book of Isaiah taken as a whole is majestic. It's sort of like the Bible squashed into one book. It asks us to imagine right at the beginning of Isaiah, the creation and then the recreation of the entire world. It begins in verse two, chapter one, with heaven and earth called to bear witness. It says, hear, O heavens, listen, O earth. And it finishes, the last verse of Isaiah finishes with a new heaven and a new earth. As the new heavens and the new earth that I will make endure before me, declares the Lord, so will your name and descendants endure. And so Isaiah takes us, if you like, from the beginning of history to the end of all things, from creation to new creation, which in fact is what the whole Bible does from Genesis to the

Revelation. It takes you from creation to new creation. And so Isaiah does that in a smaller period. Isaiah insists that God is doing something throughout all of time and eternity, throughout history, for which even the ends of the earth wait. God has an all-encompassing purpose.

And it unravels for us page after page in Isaiah in the same way that it unravels for us page after page in the Bible. And of course, in unraveling God's great plans and purposes, we get a picture of the magnificence of God. And we saw that in the first of these sermons on Christ and the Bible saturation in Isaiah chapter six, the glory of God in display. And we get another one here in verse two of Isaiah 66. This is what the Lord says, heaven is my throne and the earth is my footstool.

It's the only place in the Bible where the earth, the thing that we're sitting on right now, you know, apart from your chairs, and is described as God's footstool. This building is built on God's footstool.

[7 : 15] But the significance of this is the enormity of God's footstool. It gives you a picture of who God is, the enormity of who God is. The earth, which is God's footstool, is six and a half thousand kilometres straight through. It's 40,000 kilometres if you go around the outside. It weighs something like, guesstimate here, 60 million trillion tonnes. That's a whole lot of zeros there, I think.

Has a surface area of 510 million square kilometres, a volume of around 10 trillion cubic kilometres. It spins at 1,600 kilometres an hour, and God says, this is where I rest my feet.

It gives you a picture of the majesty of God. And again, what we're meant to get here from the beginning of Isaiah is that we're small, he's big. Because my footstool that I'll go to tonight, and I'll click up when I turn on the TV, is about this big. And you know, I can throw this thing.

It's not that big. God's footstool is this world in which we sit on. We're meant to get a picture of the magnificence of the God that we have come to worship here tonight. He sits on a throne, which we saw from Isaiah 6, is his right to rule, because it's the throne in the heavens, it's his right to rule all the universe that he has created. And he touches the earth with his feet.

The doctrine of God is given further clarity in verse 2. Has not my hand made all of these things? And so they came into being. His footstool was made by him.

[9 : 00] The heavenly realms made by him. Everything made by him. And so what that means is, because he is supreme over all things, it's his agenda, his purpose, that matters more than anything else.

And the last verse of Isaiah gives us his purpose. As the new heavens and the new earth that I make endure before me, so will your name and descendants endure.

From one new moon to another, and from one Sabbath to another, all mankind will come and bow down before me. God's grand design is worship.

His grand design for his world is worship. God's plan is for the world that he made, that is his footstool, would see his glory, would bow at his feet in humble submission.

Throughout all time, all of history and eternity to come, God's design is for people to worship him with humble and contrite hearts.

[10 : 09] God says in the new heavens and the new earth, the redeemed of the entire human race will offer unending worship at the feet of their creator. Isaiah. And Isaiah, as you go through, we're not going to see this right now, but as you go through, Isaiah leaves us in no doubt that the key to this new world and this true worship is God's perfect suffering servant king, who we know to be the Lord Jesus Christ.

The invincible purpose of God is that the gospel of the glory of Christ spread to all the peoples of the world so that they might come down and bow in worship of him.

Worship is his goal. It's not a means to something else. It is his goal. It's made explicit for us that Jesus is the centre of it in the promise of Philippians chapter 2.

Who being in very nature God did not consider equality with God something to be grasped. This is talking about Jesus. But he made himself nothing. Taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness and being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death, even death on the cross.

Therefore God has exalted him to the highest place and has given him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus, every knee will bow and every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father.

[11 : 53] Jesus is at the centre of God's purposes of worship. And the final command of the crucified, risen, all authority of Saviour Christ is that his people deliver on his purpose.

While he was here, he bore witness to himself. When he leaves, he said, your job is to bear witness to me. He says this in Matthew 28, Then Jesus came to us and all authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.

We just read that from Philippians 2. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and the Son of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you.

And surely I am with you always to the very end of the age. It was the very reason that God sent the Holy Spirit. Acts chapter 1 verse 8, But you receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and to the ends of the earth.

The invincible purpose of God is that the gospel of the glory of Christ spread to all the peoples of the world so they might see the glory of God in the face of Christ, and that they might know he's never changing, he's ever-present love, and that that would motivate them to bow in humble contrition and offer their lives as living sacrifices.

[13 : 23] That's God's grand design for his world. And if it's God's grand design for his world and for people, then I would suggest that it's his design for your life, and it's designed for St. Paul's Chatswood.

That we would fulfil what he has called us to fulfil. What is slightly more difficult?

Because I think overall, as Christians, we'd sit here and we would go, yep, no problem with that. Mission's what we do. We give money to mission.

That's why we're signing these cards next week and things like that. Slightly more difficult is that more and more, I am persuaded from the scriptures that God's design for the completion of his global plan and the consummation of all of his purposes includes the suffering and the sacrifice of his people.

God's plan is that his purpose triumph through the suffering and sacrifice of his people. Now, I don't just mean that suffering is the consequence of being obedient to God's mission.

[14 : 40] I mean that suffering and sacrifice is one of his strategies for the success of his mission. Jesus said to his disciples as he sent them out in Matthew 10, I am sending you out like sheep among wolves.

And there ought to be no doubt in our minds what happens when sheep go in amongst wolves. And in case there is, the Apostle Paul confirms the reality for us in Romans chapter 8 when he says, as it is written, for your sake we face death all day long.

We are considered as sheep to be slaughtered. Suffering and sacrifice are not just a consequence of our obedience to the Lord's mission.

It is the central strategy of his mission. Jesus calls us to join him on the Calvary Road. He calls us to take up our cross, die to ourself and come and follow him.

We are not above our master. And it's a very sobering word here. God's plan is that his gospel spreading purposes triumph through the sacrifice and suffering of his people.

[15 : 54] At the heart of true biblical mission, both for those who are on the front line of it and those who are supporting it, is the eagerness to live simply, to give lavishly and to joyfully sacrifice much because he has loved us much and he promises us much.

At the heart of true biblical mission is sacrifice and suffering, not merely as a result of our proclamation of the gospel, but as a means of the proclamation of the gospel.

So we know what God's purposes are. We know how he achieves that purposes through the suffering and sacrifice of his people. What gets in the way? And this is where I think there's some idiosyncrasies and potentially even idolatries in the Western church that results in a breakdown between us, God's people, pursuing his purposes.

Paul Borden is an American church ministry consultant. Sydney Diocese has brought him out. Our Anglican church has brought him out a number of times to help us to grow cities, to think about how to grow cities in this church.

Sorry, grow churches in this city. And his primary focus is to help those churches, whatever church he goes to and does a consultation with, to see that they structure everything they do to ensure that they are actively pursuing the Great Commission.

[17 : 31] And he suggests that churches exist for the not yet Christian, we ought to consistently, not just be running a few mission programs, but everything we do has to have an eye outward, outward, outward, think it outwardly.

And he says when a church loses sight of what it's meant to be doing, its purpose, what it does is by default it looks inwardly, thinks about itself, spends time on its maintenance programs and preservation of its history.

And so we slowly die, which is what happens to, in America, 3,000 churches in America every year. In the introduction to his book, Assaulting the Gates, he writes, and I'm going to quote extensively from him at various points here.

He says, And he goes on to give perspective, his perspective, as to why the church has lost its focus on mission.

And he gives three reasons. And I think these three reasons have got a lot of validity to them, and we need to be constantly keeping an eye on them to ensure that we are obediently seeking the Great Commission here in St. Paul's.

[19 : 07] He says, First of all, if I was requested to find just one word that would describe our culture, he talks about the church culture, the word would be consumerism.

Consumerism results in a church filled with people who are proud to be identified with Jesus Christ, and yet who in their behaviours are far more concerned with having their needs and those of their family met than reaching those who are spiritually lost and separated from God.

Time after time, I and many others have taught that the turnaround in the congregations of our region, now what he's referring to there in his region, he was in charge of 200 and something churches on the west coast of America.

All of them, or the vast majority, except a very small minority of them, were actually in decline. And his goal was to get those churches, 200 and something churches, focused on mission, thinking outwardly, rather than just preservation, and within 10 years, 70% of them were actually growing.

That's what he's talking about here. Time after time, I have, in many others, have taught that the turnaround in the congregations of our region only happened as we began to focus more on others than on ourselves.

[20 : 23] And every time I teach this truth, I hear, but what about us? What about our needs? What are you doing to help the Christians? I've come to learn that we American Christians will reflexively make sure that our needs are met.

Because after all, at our very core, we are all consumers. I want to suggest that consumerism, having my needs met, is the exact opposite of what God's strategy is to achieve his global agenda in the sacrificing and suffering of his people.

He says, consumerism in our congregations know no generational differences. The only differences are what the respective generations demand congregations to be or to do in order to fulfil their consumer requirements.

Often, older Christians are more concerned about their music and the issues of congregational structure that allow them to keep control of what is happening. The baby boomers also want to maintain the forms of worship, the buildings, and the ministries that they created in order to feel comfortable in their settings.

The emerging generations want their expectations for size and groups and media to be met in order for them to be happy. In most congregations, regardless of size, age, or backgrounds, it is all about me and my needs.

[21 : 43] And so if we say that we value this value of local and global impact, it means laying aside personal preferences and in fact actually becoming uncomfortable for the sake of others worshipping Jesus.

Secondly, he says this consumer mindset has created another phenomenon which has its roots in the fuzziness of modern theology while playing into the hands of the consumer Christ followers.

That phenomenon is the pacification of the church. The church, as an institution designed to meet consumer needs, will not tolerate dissension, even if that dissension is to point out that the church has lost its way in relation to mission.

We have lost the idea of being soldiers for the cross, an army marching for the salvation of people, and lightboat captains rescuing the perishing. Consumer Christians desire a wonderful place to worship each Sunday that meets the needs of myself and my family without upsetting the temporary camelot that they call their congregations.

In other words, what he says is that what is a core value in so many churches in the West is surface peace. Don't disrupt the peace.

[23 : 00] Keep everything calm. It's like this great cartoon I saw many, many years ago. It's a picture of the, the cartoon is the Apostle Peter on Lake Galilee with the disciples in the boat.

Jesus is walking on the water towards them. Peter got, he's got one foot on the side of the boat and he's about to step out because Jesus is calling him to come and the rest of the disciples grabbed the boat and said, Peter, don't get out, you'll rock the boat.

And, and, and that's a value is what Paul says. The value is don't rock the boat. Peace. Let's be calm, comfortable, coast along.

No one should be encouraging us to give more or do more or anything. Just, just calm. The third reason for decline, and these are all connected in one way or another, is what he calls role clarifications.

He says, pastors are called to lead sheep on a mission to attack the forces of evil. God calls upon sheep to attack roaring lions and expects them with his help to win far more than they lose.

[24 : 07] Caregivers are those people God has called and gifted to employ mercy, compassion, tenderness, and other attributes to help those who are hurting and desperately need the help caregivers can provide.

The Church of Jesus Christ is declining in our and similar nations because we have confused the role of pastor and caregiver. Congregations have allowed the caregivers to fulfil the role of pastor in most congregations.

We lift up the stories of how a faithful caregiver has helped one person because of an unending commitment of time and energy as the epitome of faithful service while also underappreciating those who have created effective systems to reach many people with the same kind of help during the same amount of time.

The constant message seems to be that the smaller the congregation the more spiritual the pastor must be. Now there are many reasons for decline in the effectiveness of the mission in the church but he suggests these are the three major ones.

Many others these are the three major ones. What is interesting is that each one of those things the role of the pastor peace in the church meeting my needs are all unwritten core values.

[25 : 36] And so when you have a stated core value coming up against unwritten core values it will impact the effectiveness of the stated core value. So here's where it gets a little bit hard for me personally.

St Paul's is a church that has a good and honourable history in its mission support. At one point this church led the Sydney Anglican Diocese in its mission in terms of giving to global mission.

That was a while ago now but it did at one point. It's had a long history of mission support. And yet for some reason and I'll tell you why I found this message on local and global impact the hardest one to prepare.

Not because of me needing to convince that this ought to be a core value but because it has been in one way or another in our history. history. The issue is not that we don't agree with it.

The issue is that there are other unwritten core values such as the three that I've just mentioned from Paul Borden that actually undermine our effectiveness in local mission.

[26 : 54] By the time I arrived here about five and a half years ago by and large St Paul's agreed that it needed to be a church of gospel light in a spiritually dark world.

That was a core value. We are a light on a hill if you like. My perception of things were more that we operated like a lighthouse rather than a lantern.

That is core value is global mission was the highest value thing. The people that we raise up as being the height of spirituality are those who leave our shores and go elsewhere.

They're the most important Christians. And so we operate like a lighthouse. We illuminate off in the far distances Europe, Africa, Asia.

And like a lighthouse that's got a strong beam out there in the distance its own foundation is plunged in darkness. Its own base is plunged in darkness.

[28 : 02] And my perception was that the core value of God's global agenda out there was coming into conflict with the unwritten core values of what we expect the church to be like here. That is we want to support global mission but right here you need to meet my needs.

now I firmly believe that the effectiveness of global mission is reliant upon the health of mission in the local church.

It's reliant upon the health of the local church. A church that is unhealthy and slowly dying ultimately will not be giving money to global mission. Will not be prayerfully supporting global mission.

That is what I'm saying is caring about God winning people to himself on the other side of the world but not actually caring about my neighbours being drawn into fellowship in the local church to me appears to be sort of like lip service.

And it's a lip service that I myself have paid. I give money to mission, I talk with our link missionaries, I pray for our link missionaries and yet except for today, I don't know the names of my neighbours in View Street.

[29 : 28] That's because I think it's harder getting entangled in the relationships that are close than it is in the relationships that are distant. It's much easier to deal with stuff at a distance than it is to be close with people.

And that explains something of the pendulum swing that I've been trying to lead us through in all its messiness for the past five years. My focus has been and it will continue to be to lead us to be an effective life-saving station in Chatswood.

And part of those things are ensuring things like we are constantly thinking outward and that our pastors are viewed and operate as mission leaders and not as masseurs, for instance.

Not that we do that. What tends to happen though when I believe that we keep our eye on God's global plan, God's global agenda, what he's doing, when we get such a vision of the majesty of God, what happens is mission.

What flows out of that is mission. That is the way to raise the profile of mission in the local church is to talk about God, not to talk about mission agencies.

[30 : 48] It's to give people a picture of the majesty of God. And so I believe that's what's been happening bit by bit, as imperfect as it is. Our giving to global mission has increased from \$66,000 in 2008 to over \$100,000 last year.

We have grown by 10% a year consistently for the last five, six years, something like that. Now I know that's not enough. I believe that we ought to be able to be doing more.

But my aim is for us to continue to keep going. Maybe we should be shooting for something like \$115,000 this year. Now I'm fully aware that we've got a long way to go, but I am encouraged. What I'm particularly encouraged by is things like the establishment of the International Chinese School.

That's about mission in our local area. That's what that is. And this church has put a phenomenal amount of money into taking a risk to do something different for the glory of God in this place.

That's astounding in my mind. What is really astounding is other things like there's a group of ladies from St. Paul's from different congregations right now attempting to do mission work amongst sex workers in our area.

[32 : 04] Friends, I don't know if you realise this, but there are people hurting in Chatswood. There are women within hundreds of metres of this building who are in sex slavery right now. And there is a group of women who are just trying to work out how do we minister, how do we bring the gospel to bear on those people in our local area.

I'm excited about that. I've heard someone, one of our younger people is interested in working out how to do some ministry in the nursing home just over the road in View Street, you know, just down there.

I'm excited about grassroots initiative of people who've got a vision of God's global agenda for people to joyfully bow at the feet of the Lord Jesus and worship him for all of eternity.

I'm excited that people are looking to do that. And I want to encourage you to do that. Find something you want to do and go and do it that people might worship Christ.

So next week on Commitment Sunday, I'm calling you to joyfully sacrifice and suffer a little bit more. To joyfully die a little bit more.

[33 : 14] To joyfully suffer a little bit more. To joyfully sacrifice a little bit more by taking up your cross, following the Lord Jesus and giving your life and your resources and your time to God's agenda to be fulfilled in the lives of people that you know and those that you don't.

I want to continue to encourage us as a church to joyfully embrace the sacrifice that is needed to see St. Paul's stay razor sharp in its focus on its purpose as a life-saving station in Chatswood.

Amen. Amen. To joyfully to joyfully