

The Mission of God and The Ministry of the Church

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[0:00] And Peter went down to the main and said, I am the one you are looking for. What is the reason for your coming? And reflecting upon the Saroni verses as we think of these words.

When we read the Bible, it is clear that God has a mission. And that mission is clear from the very first creation, where God says to Adam and Eve, to be fruitful and multiply and do.

To fill the earth. God's mission is to fill the world with people who bear his own image. We'll read on through the Old Testament and we see in God's word to Abraham in Genesis 12, that he promises to bless all of the nations through the family of Abraham and through his seed.

We follow that through to the very New Testament and the end of the New Testament. And we see that there is in Revelation chapter 7, a great gathering around God's throne from every nation, tribe and kindred and town.

God has a mission to have people from every nation in the earth around his throne. And along with the mission of God, there is the mission of the people of God.

[1:22] And we see that from the Old Testament people of God in Exodus chapter 19, where God reminds his people that they are the kingdom of priests. They are to be the holy nation that will be a light to the world.

And there is a mission for the people of God. Jesus picks up on that in the Gospel of Matthew chapter 28, where he says to the disciples, go and make disciples of all nations.

At the beginning of this book itself, Jesus reminds them that they are his witnesses in Jerusalem and even to the ends of the earth. There is a mission of God. There is a mission of God.

There is a mission of God. There is a mission of God. There is a mission of God. And to carry that through, there is the ministry of the Gospel. And we see the journey of the disciples of the apostles in this lecture.

They go from Jerusalem to Judea to Samaria and ultimately to the ends of the earth. They are carrying the ministry of the Gospel as Philip, for example, goes down to Samaria.

[2:26] As we see Philip going down to Gaza and the journey that we see to this point in the book of Acts, there is that movement. The people of God are mobilized in the mission of God to bring the Gospel where it has never been before.

So there is the sense of the kingdom of God expanding. There is a sense of the boundaries of the kingdom of God being stretched and pushed out. And that is what the church is for.

And we are here tonight as those who belong to that movement, as those who are the people of God, who are involved in the progress of the Gospel of Jesus Christ in order to build the Church of Christ here and beyond as we minister around us and as we minister in the wider community and in the wider world.

And bearing that in mind this evening, I want us to think for some time on the mission of God and the ministry of the church. I want us to think first of all of the progress of the Gospel and the readiness.

And we see that in particular in the experience of this man Cornelius. We see at the beginning of the chapter, he was a centurion of what was known as the Italian cohort.

[3:46] He was a Roman centurion and by his very name, he was a Gentile. He was beyond the Old Testament boundary of the people of God.

He was outside of, he was on the other side of the boundary. And we find that he is in Caesarea and he is there where there is a large Gentile population.

So we have a setting where we have an individual who is part of a larger group of people and they are currently beyond the known boundary of the kingdom of God.

And we see this man Cornelius, we see how he was ready for something to happen by his very activity.

And we see that he was devoted, he gave alms generously and he prayed continually.

[4:47] He was beyond the boundary, he was a God-fearer. He was kind to the people around him. He loved his neighbour and he engaged with God in prayer.

He was not, he did not belong to the visible Church of Christ in the world at this time. But here he was, he was waiting for God. We understand that he was praying to God because God had a promise that the gospel was for all nations.

And we can imagine this prayer fixing on the Old Testament promise and kind of saying to God, this is what you have said that you would do.

Here am I as one of the people of these nations that your promises refer to. And I pray to you to fulfil your promise.

The readiness and prayer. We tonight are gathered as a congregation of God's people. We are looking for the progress of the work of the kingdom.

[5:55] And we are doing so, we pray and hope as those who are reaching out to God in prayer because we sense that we have a need. Not that we are outside of the boundary of the kingdom of God, but being inside it we are sensitive to the need of having a fully established ministry of the gospel around us.

A team ministry that will carry the work of the gospel forward. We are prayerful. And as we move on we can remind ourselves of what James says about Elijah.

He prayed fervently. In other words, he prayed in his prayer. And that reminds us that we can pray with words on our lips without having the heart engagement with God.

And tonight we are seeking the kind of prayerfulness that Elijah had. The kind of prayerfulness that Cornelius had. That we are engaging with God because of the purpose of God and because of the promise of God.

And because of Cornelius' readiness, God was ready. God was listening. And God was answering.

[7:13] And that's what we read the verse number four. He stared at him in terror and said, sorry, before that, an angel of the Lord came in and said to him, Cornelius. And he stared at him in terror and said, what is it, Lord?

And he said to him, your prayers and your arms have ascended as a memorial before God. God is hearing the prayer. God is remembering that this man is here in Caesarea amongst the Gentile nations.

And he's loving people and he's giving expression to his love for God. And this rises up into the presence of God as something which is pleasing to God.

God. And because it is pleasing to God and it is heartfelt and he is engaging with the word of God. God is ready to hear.

God is ready to supply the needs of this gentleman and also to supply the needs of this people.

[8:17] And when we see God's readiness, we understand how precise the message of God to Cornelius is. And now send men to Joppa.

Who's in Joppa? Simon Peter. And bring one Simon who is called Peter. He is lodging with Simon Atanar who is on, who is, his house is by the seaside.

God's prescription is specific. The passion, the place. And Cornelius responds. He immobilizes his people to go exactly where, where, where God told Cornelius to find the passion.

God is ready. He's prepared so that when we are ready, and of prayers, he is ready to point us in the right direction.

And tonight we are seeking to be sensitive to the voice of God. That in our prayers, it's not one way traffic to God, but that in our prayers, we, we are hearing from God.

[9:31] And that the more that we are engaged prayerfully, fervently before God, the more we sense that God is guiding with his counsel.

That's what we need. That's what I need. That's what we need together. To have this readiness for the progress of the ministry of the gospel. That we have the readiness. That we have the readiness. That we have the readiness. Which speaking with, with all respect, that we have the readiness, which makes God ready. And then there is precision. Here is the man.

Here is the place. Go and send to him. That is the progress and the readiness. Secondly, what I noticed that there is the progress of the work of the kingdom and the resistance.

And for the resistance, we find Peter. Daring Peter. The Peter who stands at Pentecost, the apostle of Jesus Christ.

[10:33] When all are laughing at what God is doing by pouring his spirit, he stands up before the people and he said, these are not drunk with wine. This is what God said through the prophets.

He is daring Peter. He understands his Old Testament scripture. And he is telling the people at Pentecost, this is in fulfillment of all that God has said.

And as he himself is engaged in prayer and goes up onto his rooftop and he becomes hungry. And then we read at the end of verse 10, he fell into a trance and saw the heavens opened and something like a great sheet.

A great sheet descending, being looked down by its four corners upon the earth. God intervenes. He comes into the experience of Peter.

The Peter who knows the Bible. The people who knows the mission of Christ. The people who knows that God is fulfilling his promises. He sees this vision. And in the vision that there is that sense of being brought before him in that great sheet that is descending all kinds of reptiles and of birds of heaven and of quadruples.

[11:51] And all kinds of creatures that were forbidden by the law of God. And when Peter sees all of these animals and these creatures, he is connected immediately with Leviticus chapter 11, where God said, you shall not eat this and you shall not eat that.

And everything that Peter sees before him, there are things concerning which God said, you shall not eat that. Why not? Because I want you to have a lifestyle and a behaviour that shows you are separate from the Gentile nations, from the nations out there.

So, so you see, you see the challenge that Peter is confronted. He's being asked to eat the things that he knows God's laws forbidden.

What should he do next? And when the command comes to go and eat by no means, Lord, I have never eaten anything that is common or unclean.

The resistance. Immediately, he is telling God, I can't do this thing that you're commanding me to do. Setting up the scene for this Peter who in his heart saying, I can't go there.

[13:06] God is addressing his resistance. He is preparing to, to have his message into that. And I think that that's very important for us to consider in the progress of the work of God's kingdom.

That in the experience of the minister of the gospel, who is being prepared by God for a particular ministry, there can be that resistance.

That naturally speaking, I'm not going to go there. That naturally speaking, I cannot see myself being there. And justifying that with all good reason.

Arise and eat the resistance of the minister of the gospel. And as we move on to see what happens, that kind of resistance can be in our hearts as well.

Not just in the heart of the minister of the gospel, but a resistance in the hearts of the people of God. A resistance to the will of God, to the prompting of God, to the directing of God, to the counsel of God.

[14:15] So we are looking for a place where, where the minister of God's choosing is not resistant to God's call. And where we ourselves are not resistant to God's call. And where we ourselves are not resistant to our hearts to the passion that God, we believe, has prepared for us.

Peter. And God gives the command to him, what God has made clean, do not call common. What does that mean?

It means that God has taken away his Old Testament laws. He's taken the boundary away. And he wants his people to go beyond these boundaries. And to reach all of these nations, which they were forbidden to mix with in the past.

God takes away the boundary. He makes everything clean. In other words, Peter, don't pass judgment on people.

Don't pass judgment on my word, which is wrong judgment. But understand that here is where we're at in the kingdom of God. That there are people like Cornelius.

[15:22] And they need the gospel that you in the kingdom of God has so far known. And now it is ready to move on to them.

And as soon as God says that, that's why we read the verse, verse 21. Peter went down to the man and said, I am, I am the one you're looking for. What is the reason for your coming?

And it's in that, in that encounter. That the whole message becomes clear to Peter as if, as if the, like a light bulb moment and the penny dropping.

Ah, this is what that vision meant. That here is, here are men sent from Cornelius for me to go with them to Caesarea.

And Peter, when the penny dropped and the men spoke to him, he was ready to go with them. The next day he arose and went away with them.

[16 : 26] The barriers were removed. The physical connections were made because there were spiritual connections. And these are the kind of networking that we do in the kingdom of God.

That through spiritual experience and through spiritual exercises that we are led in this way. So that there is this kind of encounter where God shows to his people, that God shows to his servants, what should take place.

He rose up and was ready to go with them. The readiness follows through because God has removed the resistance from Peter's heart.

And finally, that is the progress of the kingdom of God and the result. What do we see happening?

As we read on later on in the chapter in verse 24 downwards, we see that there is an induction.

We see that Cornelius and Peter, that they meet together. We see that Cornelius buzzed down before Peter because he's marvelling at what God has done.

[17 : 38] And in that induction of Peter to Cornelius and his group, there is at this very centre the double confession that all of this happened because God was working.

And Peter relates the message about his own vision, how God took away the resistance. That's why I'm here. And Cornelius relates his own vision that he was praying and God told him to sing for this man, Simon, called Peter.

An induction where there is the confession on both sides of the marvellous working of God. That's the result. That's what we look for in the kingdom of God.

That there is a point, a moment in the future when these connections will be there, when these confessions will be there, and when it will be clear God was in it.

And that's what will produce the results. And we read on that version of the 34 and we see that we Peter open his mouth and he preached the gospel to them.

[18 : 46] That they should know about Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified on a tree. That they should know that Jesus was raised from the dead, that he was anointed by the Spirit of God.

That they should know all of these things. And as Peter preaches to them the mission of God through the Son of God and his finished work, we see the progress.

The Spirit fell on those who heard the word. They became the children of God because the boundaries had gone.

Because the servant of God, Peter, and the church of God, because they were mobilised in the right direction. And we read in version number 45 that the circumcised people, people like Peter, who loved the Old Testament setup, that they rejoiced.

Because the nations, the Gentiles themselves, had the Holy Spirit poured out upon them as it had been poured out on them.

[19 : 53] And so the mission of God continues. The blessing. People saved. People added to the church of God. And there was local joy in the sense of the way in which the people there were excited to praise God.

And there was the wider joy where the church sent really, where they heard of all that happened and they glorified God.

The mission of God and the ministry of the gospel, the ministry of the church. Let's seek in the progress of the ministry of the gospel to have the readiness that Cornelius had.

Let's ensure we don't have the initial resistance that Peter had. But that through the blessing of God and our prayers, we ourselves will have the readiness that brings God into the picture.

And that brings the way forward, makes it crystal clear. So that further down the line, we may experience something of what they experienced. Not that we receive the Spirit of God for the first time, but that those who have not yet received the Spirit of God, that they will receive the Spirit of adoption, crying, Abba, Father.

[21 : 09] We want children to be born to the Lord. And that's the result that we have here. That the babies of the kingdom are crying for the milk of the gospel.

That's the result that we are praying for tonight. And we pray that God help us to focus our minds on the model that God has given to us in these chapters and in other parts of the Bible, so that we go forward waiting upon God, guided by God, and doing the work of God's kingdom in God's way for God's glory and for the good of his kingdom.
May God bless his word to us.