

# The Mission of the Church in the World

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[ 0 : 0 0 ] And verse 1, and he called to him his 12 disciples and gave them authority over unclean spirits to cast them out and to heal every disease and every affliction and so on.

Now, if it's true that you and I have been created by God in the image and in the likeness of God, for God, with the express purpose of praising and living and obeying God and finding our fulfillment as human beings only in God, then God has got to be your ultimate goal and objective in life.

Now, is that a logical statement or is it not? If it's true, if it's not true, then let's be done with it. But if it is true that God has made us for himself and that our uniqueness as human beings lies in the fact that we were made for God, and if it's true the Bible says because of our sin we've come out of sync with God, then surely your great goal and objective and my great goal and objective has to be tonight to discover God for ourselves.

And if God has created a way to do that, if he has reached out to this lost world in order to bring us home to himself, then surely, surely how can we give ourselves to anything else or anyone else in the world?

That's the first thing I want to say. The second thing is this. If it's true that God came into the world in the person of Jesus Christ and that God who created the universe in all its marvel and its all its inexplicable size, if he actually became a man, think about that.

[ 2 : 2 8 ] That has got to be the greatest truth that ever has taken place. It's got to be the greatest event that has ever taken place in the history of mankind. And if the reason he became a man was to give his life as the sacrifice in order for us to be reconciled to God, then how can you not listen to what this Jesus has to say to you?

How can you prefer to listen to something that has absolutely no value at all and to live your life choosing a path that has absolutely no value at all, knowing that one day you're going to die and when you die, you're going to have to give an account of yourself to God.

And all the time you've had the opportunity to be right with God and you haven't taken it. You haven't listened to him. I don't get that at all.

I don't understand a person who hears the gospel, who reads his Bible, and then just walks away from it. As if, well, it's just another piece of information.

It's just another book. It's another theory. No, no. It's not. It's either true or it's not. And if it's true, then I hope there isn't a single person here tonight that would walk away from that truth.

[ 3 : 5 9 ] Surely you've got to make it your first priority to be right with God and to come to know the Lord for yourself personally.

It's not good enough that someone else is a Christian. It has to be you because it was for you that Christ came into the world.

For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son. Now that's the message that we call the gospel. The message that God became one of us, gave his life for us in order to redeem us and reconcile us to God, rose again from the dead in order to have the victory over the grave and so that he could promise us everlasting life.

And that's not an empty promise. It can't be because he proved it by rising from the dead himself. The gospel is the message that Jesus came into the world to save people like me and you.

But we will only be saved if we come to faith in him and come to accept this gospel for ourselves. But surely you've got to say that if it's true, you've got to agree it is the most crucial.

[ 5 : 25 ] It has to be the most important first priority in your life. Now everything I've said so far has got to make logical sense and it answers the question as to why we're here and what the ultimate purpose of living is.

It's God. God is the ultimate purpose, our creator. That's why the Bible tells us to remember your creator and by remembering your creator what we're doing is come to know your creator and the Bible is the way in which we can come to know God for ourselves.

If I was to go into Sahel Street or Princess Street or Union Street and one of the big cities and I was to go and ask people if they believed in God, then a lot of people would say, yes, I do.

But if you then went on to ask them what they believe God to be or what do they mean by God, you would get a variety of different answers. You'd probably get a different answer from every single person.

That's why when Paul stood on the Areopagus in Athens, he didn't try to prove that God existed. He simply explained what God had done.

[ 6 : 50 ] Because by explaining what God had done in Jesus Christ, he is defining who God is. and he's making it abundantly clear what he means by God.

And the gospel does that. The gospel never tries to prove that God exists, but what it does do is it explains the nature of God and it explains what he has done in sending his son into the world.

A lot of people won't accept the gospel because they don't, they say, well I have two hundred, there are so many questions in my mind and until I get an answer to all of my questions then I cannot believe.

Well, you'll be waiting for your whole life then. I don't have a question, I don't have an answer to all the questions that I could ask tonight and I've been studying the Bible for decades.

There are loads of questions that I still haven't had an answer to but faith goes beyond that and it accepts. faith is what accepts what God has done in the person of Jesus Christ without first getting an answer to all the questions that we ask.

[ 8 : 06 ] That doesn't mean you don't ask the questions, I would encourage as many questions as possible but don't always expect an answer because there are some questions to which there isn't an answer, at least in this world there isn't anyway.

So that's the message of the gospel. It is crucial and that's what the disciples came to discover as they lived with Jesus and as they listened to him and as they watched his extraordinary power and as they followed him from town to town and village to village and as they grew in their knowledge all the time but the time came where Jesus sent them out.

I don't know if you think very much about the disciples as to who they were. Some of them were more well known than others. The best known disciple of course is Peter. He was probably the most outspoken of all the disciples no more about him than anyone else but of course there was James and there was John and there was Matthew and so on and so forth.

The Bible tells us the gospels tell us that Jesus called his disciples first of all to be with him. Mark chapter 3 it tells us so that they might be with him and Mark chapter 3 says so that he might send them out to preach.

They were to be with him first of all but then they were to be sent out to preach. They were to be given the responsibility of taking this message of the gospel that God has come into the world and tell people about it.

[ 9 : 50 ] And that of course is the mission which Jesus sent them on. It's what we call evangelism.

Evangelism is where you simply tell people what I've just told you and you tell them in the hope and in the prayer that God will so open up people's hearts that they will like you and I many of us tonight have come to know that personal knowledge of Jesus Christ for ourselves.

Normally if you want to know about evangelism in the Bible the first place you go to is Matthew chapter 28 where Jesus just before he ascends to heaven after he's risen from the dead he says to his disciples go into all the world and make disciples of all nations baptizing them in the name of the Father the Son and the Holy Spirit teaching them to observe everything that I've commanded you and lo I am with you always even unto the end of the world.

That's what we call the great commission. It's where Jesus the last thing he does before he ascends to his father where he was before he sends out his disciples to be his ambassadors and to be his representatives in the world he gives them the responsibility of taking the message that they have just witnessed with their own eyes that Jesus is risen and that he has died for sinners and to take that message into all the world and of course we know what happened we know the book of the Acts of the Apostles tells us about the kind of obstacles and the kind of encouragements and what God did through the preaching of the word but that's not the only place we find Jesus sending his disciples out here in Matthew chapter 10 there's a kind of a this is many months after the disciples have started following Jesus and they've already seen many things from him and now it's like he puts them on a test he gives them an assignment and he sends them out we don't know how long they were sent out for another gospel

Luke's gospel tells us that there weren't just the 12 disciples but there were 72 others so this was a big operation this was a major enterprise where they were to go out in pairs and they were to go throughout the region of that time and they were to preach the gospel if you like it was a foreshadowing a rehearsal it was a real rehearsal it was a dress rehearsal of what the disciples would one day be commanded to do and to spend the kind of work that they were to spend their life involved in this was a rehearsal if you like it wasn't a pretense it was a real assignment that Jesus gave them and there were which they obeyed and as a result of which they saw real results with people coming to believe in

[ 13 : 12 ] Jesus we don't know how many we don't know how many people were struck by the gospel we don't know how many people were convicted and some people may have heard the gospel on that occasion and it may have been months or years before they came to a real faith in Jesus Christ nevertheless they were commanded to go out now what I want to suggest to you this evening is that not only was this a foreshadowing of the work that Jesus would one day give to the disciples I want us to recognize in this chapter that it has all the hallmarks of what God requires of the church and the church is you and me two thousand years later I want us to make a connection between where we are tonight and this chapter there are some elements in the chapter that are confined and restricted to the time and the place when Jesus told his disciples to go out but there are many elements in the passage when you look at it in the light of the whole

Bible they challenge us as to what our understanding of the gospel is and how we are fulfilling what God expects of us in taking the message of the gospel to a lost Scotland and Britain and Europe this evening and all over the world so let's not dismiss this let's not just say well this was only one event that took place in the life of the disciples it's got no relevance to us the Bible always has relevance to us so this evening I want us to ask where are the connecting points where are the links between this passage and where we are today well let's go through it then very briefly I want you to notice first of all that mission begins with

Jesus vision for the lost and that's in Matthew chapter 9 here's where chapter divisions don't help remember there were no chapter divisions in the original manuscripts chapter divisions are what we've put in and sometimes they don't help because this chapter links in with chapter 9 the passage really begins where I began reading in verse 35 in chapter 9 where Jesus went throughout all the cities and villages can you imagine the amount of work that this involved teaching in their synagogues proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom healing every disease and every affliction when he saw the crowds he had compassion for them he could not look and of course we know the kind of response that there was to Jesus power and his authority over diseases he was able to touch someone and that person was healed at that very instant and of course they did what you would expect as soon as they heard that Jesus had this extraordinary power they would find their relatives and they would take their relatives to

Jesus and of course the workload increased all the time he was inundated by people coming to him cues of people coming to him with people who were possessed by demons blind deaf lame crippled unable to move and he had compassion for them because they were harassed and all he could see around him was this massive crowd of humanity that had been created by a loving and a perfect God but were now broken and lost and helpless and wandering away from where they ought to be and here he was having come to provide the way home for them and he said to his disciples the harvest is plentiful but the laborers are few we have to share that vision the first step in the mission of the church is to see the world as Jesus saw the world as people who are lost as people who are condemned and dead in trespasses and sins without any hope and without

God in the world that's the world of humanity as God sees it he had compassion for them because they were harassed and helpless now that word compassion doesn't just mean he felt a little bit sorry for them it means that he was moved within himself Jesus was a very very emotional person we don't often think of him like that do we sometimes our vision of God is so hard and so remote as if God was incapable of feeling but this is not what we see in Jesus at all he was moved with compassion when he saw the humanity around him a humanity that he had come into the world to redeem and to save we have to see the world in that same light and with that same feeling and then it moves on to Jesus call to prayer what did he say as a result of the compassion that he felt within himself he said the harvest is plentiful but the laborers are few therefore pray earnestly to the

[18:58] Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest field I want you to notice that evangelism does not begin with any kind of campaign or strategy much and important as that is it begins with an inward compulsion if we don't have that heart for the lost if we don't have that longing a longing that results in asking and pleading that God will do something about this world and do something wonderful do something that we don't expect him to do even if it involves our hardship and if it involves us having to live outside our comfort zone because sometimes in our heart of hearts we actually prefer our comfort zone and our own routine than to listen to the challenge of what God is commanding us to do he says the harvest is plentiful but the laborers are few pray that the Lord of the harvest will send out laborers into his harvest let me prove to you what I'm saying when is the last time you have prayed this prayer

I'm asking myself as well when is the last time you have obeyed the voice of the son of God and this command goes out to you and I just as it went out to the disciples we are commanded to pray that the Lord of the harvest will send out workers into his harvest field when is the last time we have prayed that prayer are you a Christian yes I'm a Christian do you follow Jesus yes I follow Jesus do you listen to what he says yes I listen to what he says do you obey what he says I want more than anything else to obey what he says well here is this command pray that the Lord of the harvest will send out workers into his field because the answer to that question is the difference between whether you are mission minded or not and I would like to think that tonight every single member and believing person in this congregation will be mission minded sometimes we divide the

Christian church into people who are mission minded and who are not mission minded that's a piece of nonsense every Christian has to be mission minded and mission minded means simply that you want others to have what you have how can you not want others to have what you have remember Levi or Matthew one of the disciples do you remember his conversion how Jesus found him at the tax collectors desk collecting taxes you remember how as he was going past he said follow me that's all he said follow me and Levi got up and followed Jesus but the next thing that happened was really quite extraordinary next thing that happened was Levi organized a dinner in his house to which he invited all his friends so that they could meet Jesus and so that they could hear something of what he had to say now you and I might not be in the position of being able to invite all our friends to hear

Jesus but we're able to invite them to hear God's word in church what is the problem by the way of inviting people to church I don't understand that is there a problem with inviting people to church it's a bit more is it too complicated I don't think so we have children in church we have families in church or is it that we just don't think in that respect I'm just I'm not trying to point the finger at anyone but I'm saying is there a problem with simply asking I know people who were converted as a result of one person saying to that person why don't you come to church on Sunday that person came to church on Sunday and they were converted now that doesn't guarantee everyone who comes to church is going to be converted of course not but when you come to church you're hearing God's message so it shouldn't surprise us when someone is converted and when

God uses that message to change that person's life it begins with prayer then begins with praying that prayer begins with being with Jesus the disciples were first and foremost friends of Jesus which means that they were with him they saw him they witnessed him and as the more they saw the more they were changed themselves in their own beings you remember in the Acts of the Apostles when the disciples were called up before the powers that be because they were spreading this gospel and there were too much happening and too many people were turning to this Jesus and a man who had been crippled at the gate of the temple had been healed and this wasn't acceptable because it wasn't legitimate it wasn't authorized by the synagogue at the time and by the powers that be you remember how the disciples were called up and they gave a defense and they told the powers that be the

[ 25 : 06 ] Sanhedrin that they were not going to stop preaching in Jesus name and they left they had to let them go you remember what it says I think it's Acts chapter 4 that they took note that these men had been with Jesus that was their qualification that was where their power came from that was where their authority came from the next thing that I see in this chapter is that mission is the verbal proclamation of the message of the kingdom verse 7 Jesus told his disciples to proclaim as you go saying the kingdom of heaven is at hand the nature of the gospel and the spread of the Christian faith is a verbal one now why is this important it is important because in the day and the age when we where we live and when we live somehow religion has the reputation of being where people are forced into belief the Christian faith is not a faith where anyone is forced into believing in Jesus it never started out that way there may have been times in history where the church got it wrong and I think there have been times in history where Christians have got it wrong and they've run away with themselves and become far too enthusiastic and power hungry sadly but the gospel is about persuading people to believe you read the Acts of the

Apostles at no time did the Apostles ever try to force anyone to become a Christian you can't do it but rather the Apostle Paul always persuaded people that Jesus was the Christ conversion is something which is a personal matter it's not something that can take place by way of force and I want to make that clear because I think that that's what singles out the Christian faith from many other faiths in the world that it is a faith that is and I would also hope that in time to come whatever persecution that there is and whatever hostility that is about the Christian faith that's why free speech is such an important quality in our society because as long as there's free speech then I can go and I can say to people I can tell people that Jesus is the son of

God that Jesus is God and that he died on the cross and that he rose again I can tell them what the Bible says and I have every right to do so as long as my free speech is not hate speech there is the gospel can never be hate speech we can never be accused as Christians of hating because everything about the gospel is about a God who so loved the world but he's a holy God and there are certain lifestyles that are unacceptable to God because of his holiness and that's what the world doesn't want to hear nevertheless if there is such a thing as free speech and we have to try and hold on to it as much as we can as Christians we have to struggle for it and to maintain it because it's the one facility that there is in today's world that enables us to be able to proclaim the gospel as the message of

God and their message was that the kingdom of heaven is at hand verse 7 their message was that the kingdom of heaven is at hand now that was a Jewish way of proclaiming the gospel you'll see that in verse 5 they were restricted to go to Jewish areas go nowhere among the Gentiles or enter no town of the Samaritans but go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel their message was at that time restricted to Jewish people the natural descendants of Abraham and the twelve tribes of Israel and the reason for that is because at that particular time Jesus had been born among his own people and so the thrust of his message and his preaching was towards he started off with his own people in order to fulfill God's promises in the Old Testament now a time would come and it wouldn't be long before the frontiers were broken the lines were crossed and the disciples went beyond the confines of

Israel and they went to the Romans and the Greeks and they spread the gospel to the Gentiles as well but at that particular time this was the message the kingdom of heaven is at hand now if you and I were to proclaim that same message we would be saying the same thing but we would be putting it slightly differently we would be saying that Jesus has come into the world because the kingdom of heaven is Jesus if you look at this whole chapter it's all about Jesus it's all about his authority to heal the sick and to cleanse people from leprosy and to do miracles it's all about his authority his message that God had God had visited this world in the person of Jesus Christ and he was calling people to himself you'll notice also that the mission of the church takes place under the authority of Jesus himself he called to them this is the beginning of the chapter he called to them his 12 disciples and gave them authority over unclean spirits to cast them out and to heal every disease and every affliction and they went out and they possessed that power the same power as he did to be able to heal people and to cast out evil spirits does that mean that that power remained in the church in the years that followed well for a while it did the apostle

[ 31 : 55 ] Paul appeared to possess miraculous power in himself as he preached the gospel but my belief is that that power waned as the church expanded and as it developed and that power and I don't believe that that power is often to be found in the I don't want to restrict the Holy Spirit to anything I know that God is capable of anything he's able to do miracles today as much as he was able to do miracles then but it is not commonplace in today's church and that's because I believe the reason that they were given that ability was to point the people to Jesus the power the miracle working power was how they authenticated the message of the gospel if they were able by the power of God to cure someone instantly by divine power then by rights the message that they preached had to be the truth and so that's what authenticated the message it all pointed back to Jesus the message was that God had come into this world in the person of

Jesus Christ in order to save us from our sins in order to transform our lives and to create a way of access into fellowship with God once again in which we could be reconciled to him have you been reconciled to God this evening are you one with God do you know God as your own savior and as your Lord are your sins forgiven do you have the promise of everlasting life that's what the gospel is all about it's the fastest growing movement in the world tonight don't be deceived by what's going on in the west don't think for a moment that just because western churches are empty that there aren't places in the world where churches are full there are countries in the world places that you and I have never heard of towns and villages where they can't get in because of you talk to some people who have been to

Africa they have to have one service after another in order to accommodate all the people that want to listen to the gospel it's the same in China the house church movement has multiplied don't think for one of the biggest challenges for the western church is how to help and to support the eastern church the church in the far east that is growing by the day by the year don't think for a moment that just because we have outgrown the Christian faith in our sophistication in the west that somehow that makes it untrue not for a moment all we can pray for tonight is that somehow that God in his mercy will forgive us for our unbelief and for our rebellion against him because one way or another we are accountable to God whoever we are whether we believe we are or not we are accountable to God so that's why if ever there was a day when the message of the gospel needs to be heard in all its urgency and in all its power it's got to be tonight but it has to start where we are do you believe in the Lord

Jesus yourself see your savior if you found him well find him tonight don't let another day go past without finding Jesus as your Lord and if you're a Christian tonight be involved make sure that there is at least one area of mission that you know about and that you support and that you pray for please don't be left out please don't miss the boat be involved in the greatest movement in the world today let's bow our heads in prayer our father in heaven we pray that your kingdom will come and that your will will be done on earth as it is in heaven we ask Lord that you will have mercy upon us have mercy upon our own country Lord and our own society that seems to be so rich in all that we have achieved and our advancement in our cleverness in our knowledge technology and yet so poor in that we have abandoned the greatest gift that has ever been given to us the Lord

Jesus Christ we pray Lord to remember the words of Jesus that even if we gain the whole world then what good is it if we lose our soul Lord bless we pray everything that we've done this evening and bless your word to us in Jesus name Amen eres I good to be my good to you see■