

Mission of the Church

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[0 : 00] Now the apostles and the brothers who were throughout Judea heard that the Gentiles also had received the word of God.

So when Peter went up to Jerusalem, the circumcision party criticized him, saying, You went to uncircumcised men and ate with them. But Peter began and explained it to them in order.

I was in the city of Joppa praying, and in a trance I saw a vision, something like a great sheep descending, being let down from heaven by its four corners.

And it came down to me. Looking at it closely, I observed animals and beasts of prey and reptiles and birds of the air. And I heard a voice saying to me, Rise, Peter, kill and eat.

But I said, By no means, Lord. For nothing common or unclean has ever entered my mouth. But the voice answered a second time from heaven, What God has made clean do not call common.

[1 : 11] This happened three times, and all was drawn up again into heaven. And behold, at that very moment, three men arrived at the house in which we were sent to me from Caesarea.

And the Spirit told me to go with them, making no distinction. These six brothers also accompanied me, and we entered the man's house.

And he told us how he had seen the angel stand in his house and say, Send to Joppa and bring Simon, who is called Peter. He will declare to you a message by which you will be saved, you and all your household.

As I began to speak, the Holy Spirit fell on him just as on at the beginning. And I remembered the word of the Lord, how he said, John, baptize with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit. If then God gave the same gift to them as he gave to us when we believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I that I could stand in God's way? When he heard these things, he fell silent.

[2 : 17] And the glorified God saying then to the Gentiles, Also God has granted repentance, it leads to life. Now those who were scattered because of the persecution that arose over Stephen, traveled as far as Phoenicia and Cyprus and Antioch, spreading the word to no one except Jews.

But there were some of them men of Cyprus and Cyrene, who on coming to Antioch spoke to the Hellenists also, preaching the Lord Jesus. And the hand of the Lord was with them, and a great number who believed turned to the Lord.

The report of us came to the ears of a church in Jerusalem, and they sent Barnabas to Antioch. When he came and saw the grace of God, he was glad, and he exhorted them all to remain faithful to the Lord with steadfast purpose.

For he was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and of faith. And a great many people were added to the Lord. So Barnabas went to Tarsus to look for Saul.

And when he had found him, he brought him to Antioch. For a whole year they met with the church and taught a great many people. And in Antioch the disciples were first called Christians.

[3 : 32] Now in these days prophets came down from Jerusalem to Antioch. And one of them, named Agabus, stood up and foretold by the Spirit that there would be a great famine all over the world.

This took place in the days of Claudius. So the disciples determined everyone according to his ability to send relief to the brothers living in Judea. And they did so, sending it to the elders by the hand of Barnabas and Saul.

This is the word of the Lord. It's a great pleasure to be here. I've been spending a lot more time in Lewis in the last year.

And it has been to my great benefit. I come for many reasons tonight. And one of them is indeed to give you thanks. The Western Irish Presby give more to international mission than the entire rest of the church put together.

And we want to thank you for that. The generosity of the islands is well known. And I know that is not just to international mission. I know that folk are involved in charities throughout Scotland and the Western Isles are grateful to the generosity of the people here.

[4 : 46] So what I want to do tonight is really just open up the scriptures a little bit for maybe 10 minutes. And then tell a little bit, just five minutes of what I do. And then we'll talk about what is happening in the free church internationally and also at home.

So it's a kind of sandwich if you like. We'll look at the word. Brief introduction about what I do. Because folk very often ask you, what do you do?

I got my hair cut this morning and the barber says, so what do you do? And I said, I'm a minister. And he says, so where's your church?

I says, I don't have a church. He said then, so you're not a very good minister, are you? So I suppose he had a point. It's difficult to explain sometimes what a mission director does.

Let's look at this passage in Acts chapter 11. It's a fascinating passage about the spread of the gospel as the gospel spread from Jerusalem onwards to Antioch.

[5 : 49] And I just want to notice five things that we see here very, very briefly. I think the five things are all about gospel growth. And the first thing is that gospel growth can lead to misunderstandings.

Look at verse 2. When Peter went up to Jerusalem, the circumcision party criticized him. Now, the church of Jerusalem was very conservative.

They were used to doing things in a particular way. They were very, very Jewish in their culture. And that was all they were used to. And so they had heard that there was people from the Jerusalem church going up to speak to the Gentiles.

Now, the Gentiles did not have the ways of the Jewish people. Their customs, the way they operated, their culture was completely different. And so there was misunderstanding.

The people were a little bit suspicious about this new way of doing the gospel. This new way of proclaiming the gospel. And so that's the first thing.

[6 : 53] Gospel growth can lead to misunderstandings. Folks talk about messy church. Well, church by its nature is messy because we are sinners.

We are by nature messy people. And very often when new things are done, folk find that a little bit difficult and are a little bit disturbed.

As we see there, look at the word there. The circumcision party criticized him. But it's interesting. What Paul and Barnabas do is they explain the situation.

They communicate to the church back in Jerusalem exactly what was happening. They explain that they had a vision. And they explain that God has revealed these things to them.

And so we find there that criticism is very often alleviated when people simply take the time to explain what they are doing.

[7 : 55] Gospel growth can lead to misunderstandings. But the second thing we notice here is that gospel growth emerges from difficulties. Gospel growth emerges from difficulties.

Look at verse 19. Now those who were scattered because of the persecution traveled as far as Phoenicia and Cyprus. This was a difficult time for the church.

It was probably the church's darkest hour. There were lots of things going on that were confusing the people. There was moral failure in the church.

There was a famine. There was poverty. There was a message that was despised. It was a divided church. You only need to look at Corinth.

And so you can imagine all these difficulties. Folk would say the secular authorities, the secular mind would say the church is dead. The secular mind would say that all these difficulties mean the end of the gospel in this particular area.

[9 : 03] But we see here that gospel growth emerges from difficulties. That is the way God works. That his gospel cannot be thwarted.

And it will not be thwarted. The New Testament church grew amidst the most difficult circumstances that you can imagine. Everything was against it.

The world, the flesh and the devil. And yet King Jesus had his army and it moved on. Thus it has always been so.

Jesus Christ the same yesterday, today and forever. Gospel growth emerges from difficulties. The third thing we see here is gospel growth embraces diversity.

Gospel growth embraces diversity. At first we find that they only spoke to the Jewish people. And then you read there that they travelled as far as Phoenicia and Cyprus.

[10:07] First of all speaking the word to no one except Jews. But there were some of the men of Cyprus and Cyrene who in coming to Antioch spoke to the Hellenists also.

The church is one of the most diverse movements that we can imagine. The church here in Stornoway has I think a growing diversity.

And that's what gospel growth does. It sees no human barriers. There is no one. Are we okay with the sound there?

Can I help you at all? Are you okay? Fine. Everything seems to be working here. So what we're seeing is that the church has got tremendous diversity.

There is nothing and no one beyond the claims of Christ or of the gospel. And so that means surely that the church has got us glorious diversity.

[11:18] And that's what we celebrate. And that's what we honour. But the fourth thing we notice here is that gospel growth comes about by supernatural means. Notice what it says here.

The Lord's hand was upon them. We can have all the strategies we want under the sun. And I deal with strategy every day of my life.

Every single prayer we talk about strategies. We talk about ways of doing things better. And that is absolutely right. The Lord wants us to think strategically. But here we see that gospel growth comes about by supernatural means.

The Lord's hand was upon them. Verse 23. They saw the evidence of the grace of God and they were glad. The church will grow not just in the strategic meeting.

The church will grow from the power that comes from the prayer meeting. And if a strategy is not bathed in prayer. If a strategy is done in the strength of man.

[12:20] And if the free church's strategy is done in the arm of flesh. It will fail and it deserves to fail. And so here we have the spirit of God is moving.

Gospel growth comes by supernatural means. And then fifthly notice that gospel growth comes from a culture of discipleship. We read there that the people of Antioch, they were called Christians. First, of course, at Antioch. And we read there that Peter and Barnabas, Saul and Barnabas went in among the people.

And he preached a word of him for a whole year, it says there. And they moved on to discipleship.

You see that in verse 26. And in Antioch, the disciples were first called Christians.

So let's remind ourselves of what we have here. Number one, gospel growth can lead to misunderstanding. Number two, gospel growth emerges from difficulties.

[13:28] Number three, gospel growth embraces diversity. Number four, gospel growth comes about by supernatural means. And number five, gospel growth comes from a culture of discipleship.

In Antioch, we see ordinary disciples of Jesus spreading the gospel. That's what we want to see here in Stornoway. And that's what we have seen for many years.

Ordinary folk spreading the gospel. And men and women coming to know the Lord. So that then is just a brief, as it were, opening up of Acts chapter 11 to tell us about these things.

Tonight, I want to begin with two statistics. Statistic number one is that only 15% of all Christians are found in the global West.

So that's Europe and the USA. 15%. 85% of Christians are not white.

[14:44] They're not European. They're located in the South and in the East. 85% of the world's Christians are now in Africa and in Asia.

Hold on to that statistic. The second statistic is that do you know that the percentage of churchgoers is greater in China than it is in Scotland?

5% of the Chinese population attend church. Less than 4% of the Scottish population attend church. I find that absolutely unbelievable.

And by 2030, China will have the largest country in the world. Of course, every third person is Chinese. But China is on track to have the world's largest Christian population.

So that really is quite extraordinary. And it means certain things. It means, in terms of mission, no longer are we, the West, the strong church, sending missionaries to the South.

[15:53] But we are seeing more and more of the South of the strong church sending missionaries to us. One of our ministers in Dundee in Brody Ferry is Brazilian.

And there he is, spreading the gospel in Brody Ferry, Dundee. Whereas 50 years ago, we would have been sending a missionary to Brazil. And it's wonderful to see that diversity. And it's quite humbling. So please keep these two statistics in mind. Only 15% of the world's Christians are here in the West. And in China, more folk, percentage-wise, attend church than do in Scotland.

And that means that Scotland is a very, very needy land. That means that the island of Lewis here, where church attendance is, the population clearly is going down as well.

So it's a complex statistic. But there is a need, clearly, for the gospel here in our own communities. So, back to the barber's question.

[17 : 05] So what do you do? I am a mission director, or the mission director, for the Free Church of Scotland. Someone described that as being a mission champion.

I'm not so sure about the champion bit, but if it means speaking to others on behalf of the subject of mission, I will certainly take that title.

In a recent talk I did, someone close to me said, David, you sound a little bit like a Tesco manager speaking about new outlets.

And I think that was a valid criticism. It's not about us going and setting out new outlets of the Free Church of Scotland all over Scotland. It's more than that.

It's about kingdom work. It's about denominational work. And so, I hope that we are involved not just in denominational work, but also in kingdom work.

[18 : 09] However, let's not despise what we are doing. We're a small denomination, but in the providence of God, God has given us so many opportunities.

Let me just explain our philosophy a little bit. First of all, what do we do? I work for the mission committee, not the missions committee.

That's very, very important. I'm not the missions director. I am the mission director. And that's very important because it means that every single thing that we do is mission.

Someone said, David Mattis, he works for John Piper, said, there is one Christian mission. We are not to be torn between casting our support behind mission among a reached people and mission to the unreached.

Jesus' mission is one seamless garment that covers every nook and cranny of our city and every people on the planet. The mission of Jesus is one seamless garment.

[19 : 24] And so we in the church, we see no difference between national mission and international mission. It is all in the same.

We don't talk about foreign mission anymore. That's not a politically correct word because as if, you know, we are the standard and everything else is foreign, we talk about global mission.

And everyone, we're part of the globe. So there is no difference. The only difference is in terms of scope. In the mission that we do in Kyoz, to the mission in Kilmarnock, to the mission in Kyrgyzstan, or Kazakhstan, it is one and the same.

We have a particular strategy in the Free Church of Scotland. The first thing I must say is that we have got limited resources. We don't have multi-million pounds.

We've got limited resources. We only have a certain amount to spend. And so that means when we do certain things, we emphasize, for example, we emphasize word-based ministries.

[20 : 38] And we always work in partnership with others. Let me explain that. You will never find a Free Church of Scotland in South Africa. You will not find a Free Church of Scotland in Peru.

And you will not find us doing things on our own out there. We always work in partnership. Now that is a change. Many years ago, we would simply do our own thing out there and we would set up essentially Free Church of Scotland congregations.

But in the last few years, we've realized that that's a wrong thing to do and we always work in partnership with other people. And we're also time-limited. Sometimes we have to move on.

And that's a good story. We moved on in South Africa. I was over there a few months ago. The South African church is now independent. It's running its own affairs. We're moving on from the colloquial in Lima, Peru.

It's 100 years old in June. Job done. We are moving on from that to do other things whilst retaining some degree of connection.

[21 : 49] And I'll explain a little bit about that later. So I want to just bring you up to date of what we're doing in the church. And remember, the church is the world, is God's missionary society.

It is a church that God has designed to be the ultimate missionary society. In the Free Church of Scotland, we're involved in one or two things. Let me, for many of you, this is revision. For some of you, this is new. Let me tell you where we are working at the moment. First of all, of course, let me talk about the familiar and then we'll move on to the unfamiliar. We're working in Peru. We have three areas where we're working in Peru. One is what we call CEL, the Universidad Seminario, of Lima, the University Seminary in Lima, Peru, where Donnie Smith is the principal.

Now, Donnie Smith has just retired there. He's retired as a Free Church minister. He's 65 years of age and he is no longer, as it were, on the payroll of the Free Church.

[23 : 02] But he has done an amazing job out there. Can I say, we still finance, financially support, both Donnie in terms of housing and we also give a grant of £5,000 a year to sponsor students through that.

But the Seminary there is more than the Seminary is an actual university and there's faculties of psychology, business administration, theology, engineering and primary education.

So all that has been done. Donnie Smith is a really quite remarkable man. He's self-effacing, he's very, very quiet but under his leadership that leading university has been established and there are thousands of students there.

I don't have the exact number, I thought I had written it in there but it's thousands of students. And then of course we are involved in the Collicula, the Collicula San Andres that many of you are familiar with.

started 100 years ago. I'm going over to the centenary in June and what it's doing is a private school training some of the leaders in Peruvian society and the gospel impact of that school has been absolutely amazing.

[24 : 22] Currently we have Katrina MacDonald over there, Katrina is teaching English and Zoe Baxter who's a member Nairn has just started there a few weeks ago and the work goes on.

100 members of staff, 800 pupils, reaching over 500 families with the gospel. Now, this illustrates exactly what is a good thing that we're doing.

We are no longer responsible for the management of the Collicula. It is in Peruvian hands and the Peruvians are running it very, very well.

They're running it profitably. They're running it, keeping the same gospel emphasis that has always been there. And it is not a bad thing that we are giving it up.

If you had a, I don't know, if you had a 35-year-old son, maybe this, as I say this, this is maybe not the best illustration, who comes and says, mummy, can I have some pocket money?

[25 : 36] Maybe your 35-year-old son still says, mummy, can I have pocket money? But if you're still having to feed that 35-year-old son, giving him, I don't know, hand-feed him with a spoon, and do various other things for him, it would be ridiculous.

We raise our children to fly the nest, and it's exactly the same. And so the fact that we are no longer running the colloquial is a good news story.

It's taken a long time to get there, but they're running their own affairs. So the colloquial is high end, but we also run or were involved in another school.

It's called the Annie Soper School. Now the Annie Soper story is part of missionary legends. Annie Soper was a free church of Scotland missionary who went to Lima in the 1920s, and she crossed the Andes on a mule, and she suffered such opposition.

For example, the local nuns tried to poison her. And, you know, we look at nuns, and they're large, I'm sure, today, nice ladies.

[26 : 59] But back there in Peru, in the 1920s, there was such opposition to the gospel. And so the Moyabamba Presbyterian Church has founded Annie Soper School.

Now, I am embarrassed to say, I phoned for information today, we only support that to the tune of £400 a year.

I don't think that's enough. We give thousands to the seminar, we've given hundreds of thousands to the colloquial over the years. We only give £400 to the Annie Soper School, which supports the poorest of the poor.

I told this story about six months ago to the Kilmally congregation, and they felt so sorry for the Annie Soper School that they immediately started to raise money.

So I'm letting you off the hook, you don't need to do that. But really, I think we could and should be doing more for that. So that's the whole South America. We work in Peru in these three areas, and we also work in Colombia.

[28 : 14] We have got a man there called Manuel Riano, and Manuel Riano works in a seminary in Peru, and he works in counselling ministers.

Now again, this is an extremely important job. And it's becoming even more important that in Colombia, as many ministers, experience stress, they cope with breakdown, they cope with temptation.

There was nobody in the church that they could go to, confidentially, privately, and just pour out their souls. That is exactly what Manuel is doing in Colombia.

He's also teaching there in the Colombia Bible Seminary in Medellin, and he's involved in crisis intervention. So he's pastoring the pastors.

Again, we are supporting Manuel fully to about the tune of I think £50,000 a year, supporting that work there. He's moving in a few months to plant a new church in Medellin, and he's going to be involved in the staff there planting that church.

[29 : 33] Now, his work in the seminary is important. Only 15% of ministers in Colombia have got theological training. Now, imagine if you had a doctor, you're going to have an operation, and before going under the anaesthetic, you ask, what qualifications does the surgeon have?

and the nurse says, oh, he's got an O grade in biology. It's a D right enough, but you know, he tried his best. How much more has the physician of souls have to be trained to rightly divide the word of truth?

85% the same percentage of Christians in the global south, 85% of pastors in Africa are untrained. Now, that is a dangerous situation if you have untrained pastors not rightly dividing the word of truth.

So what we are trying to do is put money and resources into training ministers. So that's what we're doing in South America, these three areas in Peru, and that one area there in Colombia.

Let me take you now over to Asia. Let me take you to India. India. Now, our partner church in India is called the Presbyterian Free Church in India.

[31 : 01] It's a small denomination, only four congregations. You'll know about the schools in Chapara and Lacknadon. You'll know about the hospitals in Chapara and Lacknadon also.

The mission schools in Chapara and Lacknadon cater for over a thousand children, almost all from a Hindu background.

It was a special thrill for us last summer. We had two friends, Samit Mishra and Pradeep Kumar, over in Scotland from India.

And we were saying, how can we help you? We give £5,000 to the schools and we give another £5,000 towards church planting there in a place called Kahani.

So, you know, we're putting £10,000 into education and church planting in India. We had a young lad from the Stornoway congregation, young Alistair MacLeod, came and asked us, how can he serve short term?

[32 : 13] He's training to be a physics teacher. And a lot of folk go to the Calicchio. And I said to Alistair, you know, why don't you try India? Why don't you have a go at Chapara?

And that interested him. And Alistair spent six weeks there, again, supported prayerfully by yourselves and some of you financially. And that, again, revived the links we had with India. some of our relationships with these older mission fields are less and less, and I want to firm them up. I want to get more relationships going there.

So please pray especially for the church planting work we have in Kahani as the gospel is presented there that the church would grow. So we're still doing things in India, we're still alive, and the gospel is still thriving there.

South Africa, I am just back from South Africa, I was there at the end of last year where Jack Whittuck is the principal of the Dumasani Bible Institute.

[33 : 22] Jack is a free church minister, he is Canadian, he is from Ontario, but he was ministering for many years in Prince Edward Island.

I was thrilled by what I saw in South Africa but also disturbed. Let me read here, this is a quote from a missiologist, during the past century the growth of Christianity has exploded in numbers.

Interestingly enough the demographic centre has shifted south with 85% now living in the global south, Africa, Asia, South America. This is great cause to give thanks, but the growth of a church has outpaced the supply of pastors and elders.

An estimated 85% of the 2.2 million evangelical churches worldwide are led by pastors with insufficient training. So Dumasani is low cost, high impact.

It doesn't cost a lot to run, it still costs a couple hundred thousand pounds, ones. But in terms of impact into South Africa, into the Eastern Cape, it really is quite phenomenal.

[34 : 43] Now there is a real need for theological education in South Africa where there is still superstition. I heard stories there of folk at funerals sacrificing bulls to appease the ancestors.

I attended the commission of assembly and for half an hour they discussed the ceremony of unveiling and decorating the tombstone and they spoke for half an hour and they turned to me and they said Mr. Meredith how do you deal with this problem in Scotland?

And I said well we have many problems but that's not one that we do have. And again a little bit of that is part of the ancestor worship appeasing the spirits of those dear departed.

These are the issues that the church has to tackle and again we need men who rightly divide the word of truth, women who are involved in appropriate ministries teaching other women and children that they also that the Bible women teach the word of God accurately.

So we're involved in that, we're all over that, we are the major funders of the Dumasani Institute. We're doing some new things as well, you all know about Nepal again in Asia, we're involved in that, the mission board is part of funding Saraj Kusala and he is not just planting a church but a church planting movement there in Nepal.

[36 : 28] A population in Nepal, you know, they believe in 330 million gods in Nepal, that's an awful lot of gods, a lot of appeasement.

The congregation that started with only 30 believers has grown and we hope to see more churches. So again, please remember that in your prayer and in your financial support.

So this is just a broad sweep, we've looked at Latin America, I've reminded you a little bit about India, the schools here in Chaparra, we've spoken a little bit there about South Africa and Nepal. What about Europe? We would love to do more in Europe. Belgium, where there's less than 1%, Evangelical is not even on the map.

We sponsor Gavino Fioretti, who is in Sesto Calendi near Milan, and again Gavino is helping there in church planting and theological education and his church that he's part of has seen some growth.

[37 : 38] We've got real love for Italy, we work with a guy called Robert Cruz, church planting very near Venice, we've also got some interests in France and in Spain.

We have recently been left a sum of money, we have been left 100,000 pounds, and it's ring-fenced for Eastern Europe, Europe, so we're looking at a couple of things there.

We're looking at church planting in Belarus, and we're also looking at a church plant in Poland, in Krakow, in Poland.

So that's so interesting that 100,000 pounds left to us by a dear lady in the Scottish Highlands specifically for Eastern Europe, Europe, and again with partners over there, with Belarusian partners, I'm meeting him next week, and we're going over to Poland, to Krakow there, to see how we can support a church plant over there.

I constantly hear folks saying to me, ah, the free church is not interested in international mission anymore. We are doing more global mission than we have ever done.

[38 : 55] in terms of the spread and the variety of mission that we are involved in. We are doing it and it's a privilege to be able to do it.

What else are we doing? Turkey. Turkey is in the news just now. The number of evangelicals in Turkey numbers about 6,000.

That is tiny. We reckon there are 12,000 folk in the free church of Scotland. So, 6,000 evangelicals in the country of Turkey.

I was over there recently with Colin MacLeod. Now, Colin is one of those unsung heroes in the free church. He doesn't blow his own trumpet.

In fact, I was tempted as mission director saying, what exactly does he do? And then I went over to Turkey and I saw what he does.

[39 : 53] he's involved in the Timothy project, which is translating Bible material for small groups into the Turkish church.

And the impact there is phenomenal. We read about the church in Antioch. They grew in terms of discipleship because of the teaching of Paul and Barnabas. people and so the Timothy project there is teaching the Turkish church, again, living in a very, very difficult environment.

He's involved in a new church plant called Betel. Now, the week before, Betel had actually closed down temporarily. The week before I came, the secret police had come in and they had abused the leaders and closed the church down.

Now, this is a country that was applying to join the EU and yet there is persecution of Christians. In fact, the main Betel church leader has now left and is seeking asylum in America.

Colin MacLeod is in the middle of this. He is an operator. He is really influential and his Turkish is absolutely fluent.

[41 : 10] Well, I assumed it was fluent. I haven't a clue, but it seemed fluent to me. When I met Colin at the airport, he was his iPod on and I said, what are you listening to?

He says, I'm listening to a French podcast just to keep my French going. He was speaking Turkish. He's got a bit of Urdu. He's absolutely incredible.

God is using that man. He's a quiet man who does not blow his own trumpet and we're pleased to again support that to the tune of £50,000 a year.

Shortison and Sarah McGillivray, and we can say here because we're not broadcasting, they are in Tehran in Iran and their work is really under the radar.

they're working with OM, Operation Mobilisation, we're partners with OM there because Iran is a very, very delicate political situation and we don't have the skills.

[42 : 19] In the Free Church of Scotland, if something goes wrong, we don't have the skills to get someone out very, very quickly. you know, if something goes wrong in Tehran and Shawas McGillivray is in prison, our principal clerk is not going to fly out with the get out of jail card and get them out of prison.

We don't have that expertise, but OM have. They're working with an aid agency that we call Operation Mercy, which is a kind of cover organisation, and they're working with disabled Afghan refugees, and again, Shawas has got an incredible language facility, speaks fluent Farsi, and he is able to communicate with the Iranians and with the Afghans there.

Please pray for them. Again, it's high risk and high cost for the church. We're investing heavily in that. Let me just, I hope I'm not boring here, but let me just conclude by one or two things that we're doing in the UK.

Glasgow, Duncan Peters there is working with South Asian Muslims. Now, you will have read that thousands of Muslims are coming to faith.

These are largely Iranian Muslims. South Asian, that's Pakistani, Bangladeshi Muslims, is one of the most difficult groups to reach with the gospel.

[44 : 04] And so we just pray. Duncan's got great knowledge of Islam. He knows it's theology. He can engage with the imams. He has a great respect for the people, which is really, really important.

He goes into mosques. He has dialogue events with Muslims. Again, one of these gentlemen who really doesn't blow his own trumpet. Please pray for that.

Jesus said this type can only come by prayer and fasting. South Asian Muslims can only come by prayer and fasting. Well, what about the UK?

What else do we do? The Free Church has just over 100 congregations. We've got about 75 ministers in charges. We've got eight ministers doing other things like professors in the seminary.

We have one army chaplain. We have one mission director. I'm not sure if you know what's happening in Scotland, but it really is quite remarkable what's happening in terms of gospel growth.

[45 : 22] We're planting a new church in Govan. We're planting a new church in Esk Valley, which is Newton Grange outside Edinburgh.

We're getting about 50 to 60 folk coming along on a regular basis. We're planting a new church in Helensborough. We're planting a new church in Haddington.

outside Edinburgh. We're planting a third church in Dundee, in Charleston. So we've got St. Peter's, we have Broughty Ferry, and now we have Charleston.

25 years ago, we had one church in Dundee that was down to single figures. Now God has prospered us, and we're looking at three in the city of Dundee.

In Edinburgh, 10 years ago, we had three congregations, and now we're looking at seven congregations. Now that's not like the Tesco model, just opening outlets.

[46 : 24] But we believe that where there are new churches, you also get growth for new believers. So please pray for that. Remember also, Kilmacomb, Christ Church, Kilmacomb.

We've got Grace Church in Montrose. this is part of the strategy of the Free Church of Scotland, is to move in to these areas that are vast in population, and yet we really need a movement of the gospel.

So please remember our church plants. I was in Dunfermline two weeks ago, and there were over 80 people in the church there in Dunfermline.

Now, it's not easy. I spoke to a colleague who preached in the Loch Inver three weeks ago, and there was one person in the congregation.

I've never preached to one before. I'm not sure how I would do it, to be quite honest. It would be quite challenging.

[47 : 37] So, you know, there are needs out there in Scotland. I was in Campbellton last Sunday morning, and we had 17 in church, four visitors.

Please pray for Argyle. So, you know, what I'm saying is these places are as much a mission field as, you know, places in Asia.

So, the church-going population of parts of China is bigger than the church-going population of Argyle. Just please remember these things.

Now, we're involved in other things also. I'm coming to a conclusion here. The things that we're involved in in terms of prayer support is not just free church, but you've got things like God is Good Africa, the Moldova work, Steadfast Global, Mural McLeod in Cambodia, the Rays in the Philippines, the Gambia Partnership, Dwelling Places, the Preachial Church, Trust, initiatives like Street Pastors, CAP, here on the islands, it's in fledgling form, etc., etc., etc.

The harvest is plentiful, but the labourers are few. Let me conclude. Please apologise for going over the time.

[49 : 05] May I say that as part of the Free Church of Scotland, we are privileged to be involved in that variety of works all over the world. Please partner with us.

How can you do that? Number one, I would say model. Have here a mission-minded congregation. Model it.

Now, I know that Stornoway is, I know that from rubbing shoulders with you over the years, there's a keen mission interest here, WFM, you have missionary speakers here, a regular Wednesday night, your newsletter always has a mission spot, your February-March newsletter, had a great article about Muriel McLeod and what she's doing out there, so model it.

I would love to have, you see, a mission conference in every congregation, at least once a year, that a mission conference would be as much part of our calendar as a communion season, that maybe one weekend a year, and we can give advice as how to run this, just have a mission conference where the emphasis in that one weekend especially is on international mission, global mission, and here abroad, just getting that focus.

Resource, again, the generosity of this congregation is legendary, the generosity of this congregation towards the wider free church has been unstinting since its inception, and we thank you for that.

[50 : 54] Keep on modelling mission, keep on resourcing mission, keep on praying for mission, but also keep on going to mission.

If you're interested in short-term mission, please speak to me, speak to the minister, we can provide opportunities.

There are many opportunities on the island for short-term mission abroad. remember, everything is mission. I'm struggling just now to get gentlemen interested in two particular congregations.

One is in Wick, and one is in Campbellton. All the young lads want to plant new churches off Byers Road.

Everybody wants to do that, you know, because it's maybe perceived to be easy. Wick's tough, Campbellton is tough. Are they any less needy?

[52 : 01] I wonder, is the minister for one of those needy congregations in years to come, sitting here tonight? I wonder, is God calling some man into mission and gospel ministry?

I wonder, is God calling some woman into appropriate ministry? Because so many of our best missionaries are women folk involved in appropriate ministries.

Is God calling you, is tonight the night, for a new chapter in your life? Moving outside the box, like one better than us, who didn't just go outside the box, but were outside the camp, bearing our reproach.

Amen. Let's bow our heads as we pray. Our gracious God, we gather together this evening, and we thank you for that brief summary of just a little bit of kingdom work.

We ask, Lord, that you would give us the vision to go, and give us the vision to pray. We thank you for the very core of the gospel, the Lord Jesus Christ, who was rich, yet became poor, so that we, through his poverty, might become rich.

[53 : 49] We ask, Lord, that you would help us to be at the church in Antioch, going forward in faith and in the power of the Holy Spirit. Bless this congregation, the pastor, the elders, the people.

may they go from strength still forward unto more strength. Lord, these are difficult days, but we bless you that you are the Lord of difficult days, and the very gates of hell will not prevail against the growth of the church.

Bless us, we pray. Be with us this evening in all that we say and all that we do. We ask this in the Saviour's name.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.