

The Mission of the Church (Part 1)

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[0 : 0 0] Over the last number of weeks in our morning worship we've been looking at the mission of God. That is kind of doing an overview of the whole Bible and seeing the single message, the single work that God is unveiling and revealing to us, his purpose. And we have finally, over the last couple of weeks, broken into the New Testament and we see there the outworking, the focus, the centrality of all of God's mission being revealed in the person and in the work of Jesus Christ. And I guess if we were to use one word to summarise the mission of God at one level it would be restoration. That's what God has come to do. In and through the work, the finished work of Jesus Christ, he has defeated, as we've seen already and thought through in our prayers, that he has defeated the only person, the only being, the

God who's defeated the power of death, the only one that can make that claim is risen. We've read about that and we are worshiping our risen Savior today. And through this risen Savior as we come to put our trust in him there is a vertical restoration between ourselves and God and that outworks itself in a horizontal restoration between us and our neighbours and indeed our enemies. And that finally comes to fruition with a restoration of the cosmos so that the world will no longer be broken and the universe will be renewed and we will be part of that. It's really a message that brings beauty into darkness at a cosmic level ultimately but also surely at a personal level. There is that great sense that Jesus for us brings beauty into our darkness and into the darkness of our experience and the darkness of much that we don't understand. That he brings sense and as we trust in him we believe in the light and the beauty that he brings us to recognise. Now if we can't see that then I think God will be for you in irrelevance. I hope today you will see a little bit more of the beauty he brings into darkness and the healing he brings into illness and the restoration he brings into brokenness. Because what we have in the last few verses of Matthew 28 is what is commonly known as although the Bible doesn't call it this the Great Commission that is basically God restating his mission to the New Testament church, to the church as it's represented here by its founders and by its earliest members the disciples and it's being restated and God is saying I am now in the position where the covenant that

I made with Israel that we just sung about in that Psalm is coming to its fruition through the church, through what Jesus Christ has done and through which the centuries beforehand have been preparing. So this is the anticipation of all we've been looking at and a myriad of other things we haven't looked at in the Old Testament. That this was always I hope that you've seen that all of the Old Testament is pointing towards Jesus and to his fulfilment and to his work and the scope of that is now broadened to beyond this nationalistic people under a theocracy to the nations of the world in Galatians 3 verse 28 we have that great promise there is neither dune or Greek there is neither slave or free there is no male or female for you are all one in Jesus Christ and so the message of the gospel is broadened as we've seen in anticipation in the Old Testament and now it's being fulfilled through this great command and commission that's given to the church of which we're apart and it's a covenantal progression. The language of this last few verses I think it's worth reading again Matthew 28 Jesus came and said to them all authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me go therefore and make disciples of all nations baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit teaching them to observe all that I've commanded you and behold I'm with you always to the end of the age something amazing about reading the great commission with bagpipes in the background just so brings it home to our nation so sorry so we do see it this restatement in covenantal this is actually what what is stated here by the risen Christ is in similar pattern and covenant language as we see in the the agreements that were forged between Moses and God and Abraham and God and David and God and there's this great declaration of who he is there's this great recognition of work to do and this great promise of his company and his being with

us and so it's a restore a restoring and a renewing of this Old Testament covenant that Jesus takes when he takes the cup in the upper room and says this is the new covenant in my blood do this as often as you drink it and now here in his resurrection not only in his death but in his resurrection coming antony he's bringing his mission to bear he's saying God has this purpose to restore and redeem through his great love and this now is your work this is the work of Saint Columbus this is the work of the gospel church this is the work that we've been commissioned to and I'd like to look at that for a few moments this morning the mission of God in the church and that we'll look at again next week as well it's a huge area for us and can I introduce it by saying that this commission that he's given is in the context of worship it's in the context of worship verse 17 when they saw him they worshiped him but some doubted and so we recognize that the followers of Jesus the people who became the church those disciples who were with Jesus had become family had become a spiritual family and who worshiped the father that was this great distinctive of the church that is seen in prototypical form here that they were all worshiping people it was important I think that it's stated here so early on they knew Christ they physically knew Christ they knew him as a friend but they knew him more than that they knew him as Lord they recognized that this is the one who is the Messiah the fulfillment of all promise and the one who had even with all their limited understanding transformed their lives and to whom they could owe their lives and give their worship he had changed their hearts changed their lives changed their priorities for ever and so the the foundation of this great commission to the church is given to a worshiping people and that is no different thought as you know as we are part of the church of the Lord Jesus Christ the body of Christ we are a people who are to be marked by the distinctive reality that we worship so you're a worshiping person I'm a worshiping person we worship the Lord Jesus Christ that's what says as a part that's what makes us part of the church when we get up in the morning what do we do we worship because we're alive we worship because God is given us another day we worship in thanksgiving to him we worship in need because we come to him knowing we can't serve and follow and mimic and be like him without his spirit we worship him daily because he's changed our hearts and our lives and our priorities and when we come together it's our recognition that we crave the worship or we crave the company of others who share that reality who also have come to know Jesus Christ and we long for that worship together and it's important reality for us there's this great sense of belonging that we come together and the great thing about here in the middle of Edinburgh and the city centre is that we are privileged of so many people visiting with us from all over the world some here longer some here just on holiday and we sense that unity and that oneness because we are a worshiping people together and we know that belonging it is what is our DNA your life it is you're not just this out of worship but it is your life you're a worshiping person if you belong to Christ it's in your DNA and it's what you want for others it's what you want for your friends it's what you want for your family members who don't know

[9:17] Christ you want them to share the Christ who has transformed our lives and who's renewed us by his grace and by his favour it's in the context of worshiping we will always be and must always be a worshiping people and a worshiping individuals through our lives we'll go and say a bit more about that but I like also the fact that the nature of the church is broad enough to allow for some doubting they worshiped Jesus Christ but some doubted I think that's good and you may not feel that sense of belonging or you may think that it's a long time since you woke up in the morning and bowed the knee and prayed and thanksgiving and in need to the Lord Jesus Christ and your doubt in His goodness and His love and your conviction of His salvation it's good that you're here because this is where you will find Jesus Christ as you come to Him in His company among those who know Him and love

Him may it be that we recognise the space for doubt and struggle within the church and I think as we look further on we will see the significance of being a church together where we can doubt and where we support one another through that.

It's just in the context of worship it's also we see and recognise a mission we've spoken a great deal about the mission of God and God's purpose and God's plan for us but we come to finally recognise in its fullness that in this age the age between Christ's resurrection and Christ's return that He shares His mission with us that we are absolutely integral to the mission of God that He is significantly one who shares with us and that we have a purpose and that we have a role to play as part of the church and I think that mission shared not only speaks about our identity but it speaks about the worthiness of our lives that He has a purpose for us to fulfil this great commission as

individuals and as a people because I think a lot of us struggle with the whole concept of what is the church and why do we bother with the church?

What does it mean for us? It's such a mess and people are so hopeless in the church and what does my commitment in the church mean?

And is it not just another competing organisation for my time? Is it not just another institution, failed in human, failed institution?

[12:13] Is this not just Derek as a leader in the church guilt-tripping me to be more involved again and committed to the work of the church? I hope that we see beyond that and recognise the great spiritual reality and the fact that in Christ you belong.

You're part of His body, part of the church and as it is reflected in a local congregation as we are then what we are striving for is to see that as a glimpse of the community of the coming age.

We belong to the people of God, part of the mission of God to grow that people and as we live our lives we are to be an expression of what that people will be like in the coming age.

In the new heavens and the new earth we are in to El's righteousness. A place where love is exclusively, it is the reign and the rule of love, the love of God which reflects God which is a community of restoration and righteousness.

And we are people of restoration and righteousness. So we see that we are part of God's mission. We are integral, every one of us, that great sense of significance and identity in Jesus who loves us, who gave himself for us, who has redeemed us, who brought us to life for this great purpose of fulfilling his mission in our lives.

[13:44] So I'm going to just make one or two characteristics that we see from mission, there's many more I guess throughout the New Testament, some characteristics of what the church on mission is going to be like and our part as individuals within the church on mission in our lives.

I think the first thing is it's going to be dynamic, we reckon, as God therefore because all authority in heaven and earth has been given to me. So there's this great sense that we are a people that are unlike any other people because we are given the authority to do what we do, to live how we live, to serve how we serve with his power and his risen authority.

And we see that very demonstrably, I think last week was it? A week ago I mentioned Peter and his restoration as a great example.

We also see in the life of the disciples how they went from a kind of stumbling shivering group of guys who thought it was all finished and girls who thought it was all finished to being people who changed the world.

In Acts chapter 4 and verse 17 we have that, when they saw the boldness of Peter and John and perceived that they are uneducated common men they were astonished and they recognized that they had been with Jesus.

[15:02] So there's this great, there's this great dunamis, this great pillar that goes with those whose lives have been touched by the Lord Jesus Christ and in communities that have been changed by the Lord Jesus Christ.

It's counterintuitive. We've heard a lot in the last few days and weeks about power, about political power, about military power and yet here we have as a church a power that is counterintuitive that is not as the world gives or that we think is significant but it is the power of worshipers.

It is the power of those who recognize the authority of Jesus Christ, the authority that allowed him to be raised, that was raised from the dead and defeated the grave and defeated the power of what is symbolized in death and separation from God absolutely and completely.

And therefore we see that as worshipers, as servants, as those who are Christ like we have a power to have our own lives and the lives of our communities changed in a way that no other power can allow for, the power of love.

It is the power of beauty and the beauty of Christ transforming the world in which we live. It's the power of rescue, it's the power of restoration and that is a core recognition, a core reality of the church under the mission of God.

[16:33] This dynamic is also outward looking. Self-explanatory, isn't it? All authority and heaven and earth is given to me. Go therefore, make disciples of all nations and that is a great confidence, isn't it, that we move beyond our borders as individuals and as churches and we worship.

We are worshipers in the world in which we live, in our communities, in our culture that we seek to understand in our workplaces, in our places of study.

We are those who go out as worshipers. We live as worshipers in this world and if we are God-centric, if we are mission-centered under God's mission, then we will also be people-centered. And can I say vice versa? If we're rightly people-centered, we will be God-centered. The two go together and we seek to reach out with this great healing, worshiping life, life that is transformed. And it's great that because it's really confident and it speaks into the world in which we live, the world that we need to go out into with the confidence of Jesus Christ. So often I think the church is insular, the church looks in on itself and the church is escapist.

[17:53] This is where we come to escape from the world and where we come and are separate from the world and it becomes our comfort blanket. The place where we want to come and get away from all the baddies outside and it's the place where we're separate and we can just relax and be ourselves.

And the danger is that we come into this mode of maintenance where we just exist for ourselves and exist for our comfort and for the nice people and the friendly people and the people that believe the things I believe, all of which is significant.

But remember Christ says that the church that reflects His mission is a going church and He commands us to go with the gospel into the world in which we live.

It's to the broken, He says, come. It's to the broken, He says, come. And we seek by going out to invite people to the Lord Jesus Christ.

We don't simply exist and say our doors are open, our lives are there. We reach out with the healing power of the gospel in our lives.

[19:05] Say more about that. It's how we're looking. But it's also under the mission of God, the church is a growing community. We're go, make disciples of all nations, huge responsibility and a huge task, isn't it?

He gives us baptising them in the name of the Father, the Son, the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all or to obey all that I have commanded you. So it's a growing community and we're growing as individuals.

There's always the two sides of that. It's a growing community and we're growing spiritually as individuals. So there's baptism and that speaks of God working in families, doesn't it?

As our understanding of covenant, understanding of how God works through covenant and works through families and works through our children. And so we're very privileged here to say many children being baptized covenantally and recognizing that it is through that work as they come to recognize faith themselves that they will be saved.

And yet it also speaks of people who are lost being found and being baptized, being cleansed by Jesus. And we long and we long to see that again and again in our churches.

[20:16] And it's such an encouragement and a blessing for us to see growth by baptism, but also growth. And I think this is hugely significant growth by discipleship.

But under the mission of God we grow as a community and we grow as individuals through recognizing the lifelong nature of our commitment to Jesus Christ.

That we're on a journey of growth, spiritual growth and maturity with Him. That we are to become a holy people.

That we are to seek, to observe and to follow and to obey Him out of gratitude and out of love for Him. And that is a great focus of God's mission for us is discipleship.

That we are growing and developing in our Christian lives. And as such we do that as a family together. 1 Peter 2, 10 reminds us of that once you were not a people, but now you're God's people.

[21:22] Once you had not received mercy, but now you've received mercy. And I want to focus on it just for a moment. This work of discipleship and of baptism is a community task.

It's something we do not exclusively together, but it's something we do together because it reflects, its discipleship and baptism reflects the trinity in whose name we exist.

It baptised into the name of the Father and the Son and of the Holy Spirit. This great divine community, this great perfect, holy, infinite society that we are to reflect in our lives.

We reflect in our discipleship, reflect in our life of worship. That we recognise and remember and know that. That we are a people who worship and who disciple and who evangelise together in our lives.

I think that's hugely significant as we understand God's mission as believers. We're believers individually, but we're believers together. Now just using the example of that, I think that social

media has changed things forever in the society in which we live.

[22 : 39] I'm not going to bash social media here at all. It can have many, many useful purposes and is a moral at that level.

But it's good to recognise it for what it is. It's an amazing transmitter of information. It's an amazing way in some ways by which we can communicate with one another, who are already in relationship with one another.

We'll be crossing lands and seas. It's a great way of keeping in touch. But the one thing that is not relational, whatever else it is, it is one-dimensional and we are alone when we are dealing with our social media.

Generally, unless you're a teenager now, where you all meet together and you still all just use social media and you don't talk with one another. That's kind of different. That's beyond the pale. But what we have here is usually when you're alone with social media and so there's something missing and I want to do that in the context of say preaching for example.

We've got access to the greatest preachers in the world today on the internet and online and it's a great thing to listen to preaching online. It's a great thing to develop learning and understanding through preaching.

[23 : 52] But it's different from worship. It's not quite the same as worship. Don't stay away from the people of God and say, I'm going to stay in my bed this morning. I'll listen to Tim Keller. He's much better than Derek anyway.

And they'll get the blessing from that. You will, but it's not the same as worship because worship is a community reality that we come together and we worship in the dynamic of relationship.

We worship because we have relationships with the preacher. We worship because we have relationships with one another and because we see and we know what the needs are that we have. And it is in the dynamic of coming together that our worship is reflecting the person of Jesus Christ and the Trinity most clearly.

And it gives it a different dimension, doesn't it? It should. There should be an outworking of our love together as we sit and worship. It shouldn't simply be a sitting passively and listening.

[24 : 50] There should be a sense of invisible interaction with one another as we come together with all our needs and our failings and our frustrations. Sometimes our annoyances and our bitternesses.

And we come together with one another, deal with them together under Jesus and in Christ. And I think to not only worshipping together but evangelizing together is something that should encourage us and help us.

Evangelism sometimes we think is scary. We think it's something that only the experts or other people can do. But evangelism is the mission of God for us. It is going out into the world as worshipers and sharing Jesus through sharing life with people.

Sharing our friendship, sharing our home, sharing our church friendships, sharing our experiences that will allow the Gospel to be reflected and seen in our life and in our family and in the relationships that we have.

I think normally speaking if we're not embarrassed by our family, we want our friends to meet our family normally, ordinarily.

[26 : 03] I know that's not always the case. But if it's not the case sometimes it's because there's dysfunction there or there's hatred, there's bitterness or there's some major issue.

And the same should be true of our believing family, not necessarily in worship but in life that we are willing and want people to meet with our Christian family, our Christian community.

And it becomes an opportunity for them to see who we are, that we are worshipers and that we serve the living God and that we share life together.

But also I think in discipleship, when we speak about this great commission, there's a community aspect that is really significant in discipleship.

And I think there's sometimes a danger, I'm jumping ahead in my notes here, can I help it? I think there's sometimes a danger that we see our Christianity as the baptism bit, the decision we've made.

[27 : 06] We've become Christians. I've been a Christian for a long time. This is what I am. And almost subconsciously we leave it there. And yet this whole mission that is spoken of here speaks of making disciples which is different, is beyond simply the decision and reminds us that it is a

whole transformation of life that we're moved from death to life.

And in discipleship I think sometimes we think holiness is simply a personal task that we engage in ourselves, privately, to me and God. Now it must be that, but He's given us family and He's given us the church and He's given us each other in order to disciple one another.

Because when in a battle, we're not yet in the banquet, it's still a battle. And you know how significant it is that we look out for one another in battle and care for one another.

There's one program, I don't watch that much television, my family might disagree with that, mindless engagement in television. But there's one program that I record and I watch faithfully. And it's called Chicago Fire. And it's about firefighters. We get firefighters in the church. This is Chicago firefighters. And it's a good program that's interesting.

[28 : 31] But one of the interesting things about firefighters, and I'm sure in other professions as well, but particularly in the, and on the battle front as well of course, is the danger of the situations they go into all the time.

But what comes across again and again, I know it's only a program, but is the ethos. We've got your back. I've got your back here. If you're going down, I'm going down with you.

If you're going into a burning building. I'm going there to make sure that you're as safe as possible. And there's this whole sense of brotherhood, this whole sense of family, of support, of making sure that we're equipped to do the right things in the right way.

And there's this great love and oneness between them. And that is a poor and shadowy reflection I recognise. But that should reflect the kind of mentality we have as a church and discipleship, that we have one another's back, that we care for one another.

So often it's, you see, the way they've just acted is ridiculous. I'm much wholeer in that. I would never do that. Honestly, it's ridiculous. They're terrible. Seen their life?

[29 : 41] Seen the way they witnessed? When were they last? And we can spend our time developing self-righteousness and judgment rather than looking and being there for each other and watching each other's back.

And so discipleship is that whole recognition of having that attitude for one another and towards one another. And that can only come through a development of relationship.

So there's a couple of challenges I want to finish with, or points I want to finish with in relation to some of these points in terms of this part of the mission of Godding. Corey next week will deal more with the worship aspect of our life.

We have this great challenge, I think, with regard to our own congregation with growth.

We see growth. We see baptisms. We see discipleship happening. And these are good things.

These are great things. I give thanks for these things, and we give thanks for these things.

[30 : 48] And it's wonderful to see people interacting beyond 11 to 12 o'clock on a Sunday.

Wonderful to see people inside and outside of their own homes and sharing life together and sharing faith together.

It's great. And we are doing that. And it's encouraging and keep doing it and keep developing that. But we also have the challenge to progress and develop.

And I wonder whether sometimes we dislocate evangelism and discipleship from our lives. And we think that's the role of the church to evangelize, the role of some institution.

Well, that's the role of the church to disciple. It's not my role. I'm a consumer. I come here to be a disciple, that I come here to worship.

And I hope other people will eventually come to know Jesus and join with that. And yet we distance ourselves from deep involvement either in evangelism or discipleship.

[31 : 52] It's other people's responsibility. Well, I'm encouraging us to recognize our place in the mission of God as evangelizers and as disciples because we are worshipers.

That as worshipers we have that privilege but also that responsibility. Yes, the church must help in that, corporately. Yes, we must equip that as our task.

That's what we've been asked to do. But as we live our lives, as you live your life, as I live my life as a worshiper, as I seek to be a disciple, observing or obeying all that Jesus has commanded, then I'm telling you, your life will trigger questions and you will evangelize.

That's what I'm saying. If we are living under the mission of God and understand who we are as we go, sometimes because we are forced to do employment or work or study, just into the world of around us, world of secularism and unbelief, then as we live our lives as worshipers, our lives will

trigger questions and we will be able to tell that Jesus Christ is Lord.

Now that needs work and it takes practicing, I was telling someone last week and I took my tell myself this regularly, if you want to practice how you share your faith do it in front of the mirror. Practice it, practice it with looking at yourself but thinking you're someone who's never heard the gospel before but is your best friend.

[33 : 29] How would you share that gospel with them? How are you going to do it? As they ask questions, will you ask questions back? Become an evangelist because that's our, God is calling us to that, what a great privilege.

He's calling us to share in His great mission and more than that He is assured us of His presence in company. So our lives should trigger questions in the world in which we live as we go but also I think in our lives together, can I just, as I challenge myself about this, challenge you all as well, is that as our lives together and in our society together and our interactions one another, not just in church but beyond church and the friendships we have, are we disciplining, well I'm the same kind of root, are we discipling one another?

Are we caring for one another spiritually? Are we building each other up? Are we able to talk about Jesus our best friend together or is it kind of, that's for church, and that's for a Bible study and that's for formal times and then the rest of the time, hey, we're just Christians and we just talk about anything.

I'm not saying we need to be pious and sanctimonious about that at all but as we recognise our need of Him daily and as we've woken up recognising who He is and just the source of life that He is that as believers we disciple one another and we help one another in that task.

I think we've come from a tradition that's hugely isolationist and individualistic, we live in that kind of society and even culturally maybe our faith is a very private thing.

[35 : 11] It must be both and and we must fight against the tendency to simply live our lives as islands because we've been saved into this great body of people that is to reflect what the kingdom come will be which is a society of righteousness.

And as we are challenged by that we have this great assurance, isn't it? And behold, I am with you always, even to the end of the age. So this isn't the end.

God's already reminding us and Jesus already minding us He's come once, He's going to come again. Trump becoming president isn't the end. Brexit isn't the end.

All of these things have all the consequences that they have and are hugely significant but the Lord Jesus is in control and He says that He will be with us until He returns, until He comes back.

And the mission of, that is the mission of God that He is with His people. That is what just soaks through all of the Old Testament anticipatory truth that it's about God being with us.

[36 : 23] I will be with you. The temple in the Old Testament, a building in the middle of the people, a tabernacle there. It was about God being with His people. And now in Jesus Christ He is with us and He's with us how?

Because He gives us His Spirit to endow us. And He is, you know, that's the focus. Emmanuel, you know, we'll be singing that in the next few weeks. We'll be talking about Him, preaching about Emmanuel among us.

Jesus Christ coming and this huge significance that God comes to us and will dwell with us through His love because of His great work as we come to Him for redemption and cleansing and forgiveness and for life out of death and the darkness of the world and the hearts that we have.

It's the focus of Revelation. I will wipe away every tear from right. It's Sam 23. I'll be with you in the valley of the shadow of death. All of these things, all of these things which this world in its brokenness and its scandalous brutality and the miserable pointlessness of war and death still speak so clearly and loudly that He says, I am with you.

I am the only answer there is. I am the only hope you have. And this is your privilege and your task to do the impossible, to grow, to plant, to forgive, to persevere.

[37 : 55] And I want us to do that as a congregation. That's what we're asked to do. We'll keep on doing this work. People that will think, oh, what are you doing now? What's your emphasis now? What's happening?

Why can't you just stop? Why can't you just maintain things? But we'll keep on reaching out. We'll keep stretching you. We'll keep stretching one another. We'll keep moving out in faith.

We'll keep planting churches. We'll keep forgiving one another 70 times 7 because that's what we're called to do and we'll persevere. And when our friends give up, we'll pull them back in because we have their backs.

We have their backs. We care about them because Jesus has our back and has cared for us. May that be the church we are, a church that partners with Jesus Christ on this great mission that is the mission of God and that is the only mission that there is.

Amen. Let's bow our heads in prayer. Father God, help us, we pray, to understand you better. Help us to know the significance of worship and enable us not hear so much because outwardly we can always give the performance of worship from preacher to hearer alike.

[39 : 09] But in our lives, in our hearts, as we rise each day, may we be distinctive because we are worshipers and all that that entails as we fulfill your great commission.

May you not be irrelevant to us. May we not be complacent. May we not simply be treading water until Jesus comes back or we die.

But give us great hearts and great energy and great strength, not our own, but your great gift for we ask it in Jesus' name. Amen.