

The Context of Mission

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[0 : 0 0] Well, we start a new series today called the Mission of God, and it's a bold title and a bold idea. We're searching in the mission of God for the reason for all of existence.

Christians have always believed throughout the centuries that God is completely happy in himself, and that creation was completely voluntary. He didn't have to do it. He chose to do it.

So one of the things we're asking is, what was his purpose? Why did he do creation when he was perfectly happy to live without it? The basic premise that we're going with in this series is that long before Christians ever started going on mission for God, God was on mission for us.

God was on mission for us in order to make sense of our mission. Our mission only makes sense within his mission. And so one of the things we need to do is we need to explore the mission of God so that we can know what we are here for.

Before we get into what Genesis 1 has to say to us about this, we have to think about the word mission. What do we mean when we say mission?

[1 : 0 9] On the one hand, the word mission is extremely unpopular in contemporary culture, especially religious mission. So most of you will know in the 21st century, and since about the mid-20th, religious missions are not popular with the culture.

There's a sense that comes with it of colonialism, of intolerance, of a culture bearing down upon another culture. But on the other hand, mission has never been more popular in all of history.

And one of the ways you can see this is that every single business today, no matter what they do, however menial it may be, always has to define themselves by a mission statement.

Everyone has to do it. I mean, what's the mission of Starbucks? You might think it's to make coffee, maybe even quality coffee, and to hand it to the person.

But if you go on Starbucks UK's website, they call their mission statement our contribution to the world. And this is what they say, it happens millions of times each week.

[2 : 1 0] A customer receives a drink from a Starbucks barista, but each interaction is unique. It's just a moment in time, just one hand reaching over the counter to present a cup to another outstretched hand, but it's a connection.

We make sure that everything we do honors that connection. And every place we go, every place we touch, we try and make the world a little bit better than the way we found it. You see, everybody today sees themselves on mission.

And you have to be on mission, because what's a mission? A mission is the answer to three questions. Who are you? What's your identity? Who are you?

If I was to sit across from you and say, tell me about yourself. And you said, my name is so-and-so, and I'm a cab driver. I'm a barber. I'm a lawyer. I'm a doctor. I would immediately know what you do.

You're a cab driver, so you wake up in the morning and your mission is to drive cabs. Maybe it's just to make money, but it's also to drive cabs. Who you are, your identity, tells something to us about what you do in life.

[3 : 15] And what you do in life gives you a purpose. It gives you a meaning. And ultimately, the third question that we can see in the midst of this Starbucks question is a reference is, what can I do to make the world better?

That's a question everybody's asking. And it assumes that there's a moral order, that there's a good, bad, and better way to live, and that there's a reason for it. You see, mission is just being, having an identity, having a purpose, and pursuing something to make something better.

That's a mission, most basically. You can't escape it. Everybody's on mission, no matter if it's for that guy, that girl, that romance, that religion, Christianity, Islam, Buddhism, for yourself entirely, for making money, for becoming divine, as some might say.

For finding a purpose to your existence, we're all on a mission. Missions make us fulfilled and happy. Make us fulfilled and happy.

So the question we're exploring is, what is the mission? What is the mission? What is God's mission? The purpose for all of existence.

[4 : 25] And if we discover it, we can discover something of what our mission is. So each week we're going to unveil a little bit of what the Scriptures say about God's mission.

And this week we begin with the beginning, Genesis 1 and 3. And so what I want to ask today is, what does Genesis 1 first teach us about God's mission and our mission?

And then secondly, in Genesis 3, what does it teach us about the irony of God's mission and our mission? So first, what's Genesis 1 teaches about God's mission and therefore our mission?

There's so much in Genesis 1. We could preach 15, 20 sermons on it easily. God is before the world.

God makes order from chaos. God is the first word of history, and he speaks the first word of history. God is the subject of the Bible.

[5 : 20] In the beginning, God, he's the very first subject. God makes light without needing a sun, the difference in day one and day four.

There's so much. But what's God's mission in Genesis 1? What's the purpose? And I want to submit to you that God's mission, the reason Genesis 1 was written, to declare that God is the God.

The God of Israel is the God above all gods. That's the mission of Genesis 1. Declare that God is the God above all gods. So how do we see this? Well you have to see two things about the context in order to see this.

The first thing is this, that nearly all Christian scholars will say that Genesis 1 is both the history of creation and the song of creation.

It's both an account of how creation happened and a point about creation. And so music, courses, poems, they have, oftentimes they have, refrains or courses.

[6 : 20] And in Genesis 1 you see that repeated all over the place. You see phrases repeated all over the place in rhythmic fashion. And God said, let there be, and it was good.

And there was morning and there was evening. It's a constant repetition of patterns and patterns, just poetic. Another thing you see is if you were to take each day and make a structure.

So if you were to take day one, two, three on this side of the page and day four, five, six on this side of the page and look at them in two parallel lines, you would see that they correspond across from each other.

So for instance, on day one, God creates light. And then on day four, straight across, God makes the luminaries of the sky, the sun and the moon. Or on day two, God separates the land from the seas.

And then across the way, on day five, God fills the land with creatures and the seas with creatures. You see? So it's set in a particular structure for you to see God forms the world and then he fills the world in each column.

[7 : 20] It's a song. It's the song of creation. It tells you both how God created and what his songs do. Songs don't just give you information. They make you feel something.

That's the purpose of music. Music makes you, music with words makes you feel something. It makes you feel a particular disposition of what, it makes you change. Music strikes your heart.

It strikes a note in your heart and it makes you change. And that's one of the things that the song is doing. It wants you to know, not just to know something, but to know something.

And that's something it wants you to know is that God is the God above all gods, above all idols. The second thing you need to know to see it is the context.

So the context is this that, again, most Christian scholars will say that Genesis 1, the creation account, was written to the Israelites about the time that they were about to enter the promised land.

[8 : 18] So you remember that Israel was in captivity in Egypt for 400 years. Slaves, they were released by God. They crossed the Red Sea. They went to Sinai. Then they came to the edge of the Jordan River to cross into the promised land.

The first time they sent spies across and out of fear, they said, we will not go. They were afraid of the gods, of the foreigners and the people.

And now in the book of Deuteronomy, Israel is back at the Jordan River a second time. And they're about to cross the Jordan and Moses. And the whole book of Deuteronomy is asking them, will you renew yourself to God's covenant for you?

Will you promise to God to trust him, to trust the God who delivered you? Or will you fear the gods of Canaan, the gods of Mesopotamia, the gods of Egypt? Will you be afraid? Or will you cross?

Will you go into the land? And that's the context. So what Genesis 1 is doing for Israel as they're about to enter the promised land for the first time? Completely afraid, as he's saying, look, God is greater than these gods.

[9 : 21] God is greater than these peoples. God has done things that these gods could have never have imagined. Now the question then is, what did those gods do that they were so afraid of?

The Israelites would have been well aware of multiple creation stories. At the same time as the book of Genesis was written, there were multiple creation stories that existed in the ancient Near East.

And one of the ones that they would have been really aware of, you can go to the blackwells and buy it today, and it's a little bitty paperback. It's called the Anuma Elish. It's a Mesopotamian creation account.

It probably started sometime, the story after the Tower of Babel fell. And in this creation account, there's a pantheon of gods, all sorts of deities.

And one of the gods, Marduk, gets in a war with the goddess of the seas, Tiamat. And he ends up, Marduk ends up defeating Tiamat.

[10 : 22] And when he defeats her, he slits her belly open and out comes her guts that spill forth and form into the world, into the earth that we live on.

The gods, however, are mad at Marduk because they're very lazy. They prefer to watch Netflix on Saturdays and sleep in on Mondays than do anything. And so the gods say, well, who's going to take care of this world you've just made out of Tiamat's guts?

And you know what he does? Marduk, he takes Tiamat's bowels and he makes from them a slave race in order to work the place 24, 7, 365 days a year so that the gods don't have to do it themselves.

And who's the slave race that he creates? Human beings, us, you see? Now you see what Moses is doing?

That's the creation stories that are being told in the ancient Near East. But what's Moses saying? What's God saying? The world is born in the ancient Near East according to all the myths either by gods fighting each other, multiple gods fighting each other, or through gods having sex with one another.

[11 : 39] That's the Canaanite story. But the God of Israel, he needs no pantheon. He is before the world. He's before all other beings.

In the beginning, God, he needs no one else. Marduk creates out of the guts of another God. Look, human beings can take things that already exist and make things out of it.

God creates, as we say in our tradition, ex nihilo. He creates from nothing. Moses is saying, don't be afraid. Yahweh, the God of Israel, he's the God who doesn't need these gods.

He was before them. He's greater than them. But even more than that, what's he saying to us? The Israelites have been in slavery for 400 years.

In total captivity working seven days a week. And Marduk, the God of Mesopotamia, he creates a slave race from the bowels of a dead goddess to make what we are.

[12 : 41] You see what Genesis 126 is about? He's saying to people who had been enslaved for 400 years, who had been told multiple stories that there were nothing created for nothing but meaningless slavery.

And Genesis 126 says that you are created in the image of God and His likeness. You see? See, you weren't created out of the bowels of Tima.

You are like God. This is how high and lofty you are. You're the pinnacle of creation. You're not a burden. You're not a stain on the universe.

You're worth something. Don't be afraid. Yahweh, the God of Israel is the God who made you. You're like God, so here's your mission. Be like God.

Image, you're His image, so image Him. God worked. Work isn't bad. Work is good. Every ancient myth said work is evil. The Christian religion, Genesis 1 says work is good.

[13 : 43] God worked. Rest is good. They said work seven days a week. God said rest. God is the king of all the universe and the first thing that He tells humans to do is to take dominion over everything.

Steward it. Be a king. Be a ruler. You see, be like God. He's telling them something completely counter-cultural from what they were hearing. One commentator says it this way.

What appears to be at stake in the narrative of Genesis 1 is the answer to the ancient question, who rules the skies and the earth? Mesopotamian and Egyptian religions speak of their great cosmic gods of heaven and air and earth.

Egypt speaks of its trinity, sin, shamosh, and ishtar. And Egypt also has new shoe and geb with the preeminent deity, Re. All right.

We'll ask you to repeat those at the end. Genesis declares otherwise. Genesis 1 declares otherwise. God rules the heavens and the earth and no one else does.

[14 : 51] In Egypt, the grand narrative of the gods in Egypt was this. They worship the celestial bodies above all, the sun and the moon and the stars.

But above all, they worship the sun. And the sun god was named Ray. And did you catch at the beginning something in the very beginning of Genesis, what's the difference in day one and day four?

On day one, God creates light. But there is no sun. There is no moon. There are no stars.

It's not until three days later that God creates the sun. God doesn't need the sun to have light. He is the light. He creates light. He doesn't need a celestial body to produce light.

You see what it's a polemic. It's an argument. It's saying the Egyptian sun god is nothing. The true god, the god of Israel, he doesn't need the sun.

[15 : 51] He's so much greater. He's the god above all gods. But even more than that, for us, there was a doctrine of the image of God like we have in our Bibles in Egypt already.

There was an image of God on earth, a human being, but only one, Pharaoh. So for the Egyptian myth, Pharaoh is the only image of God. So for 400 years, as Pharaoh paraded himself down the streets in Egypt, and the Israelite slaves saw the great image of God coming down the streets, and they were told, this is the prophet, the priest, and the king.

He's the herald of the gods. He's the representation to you of the gods. He's the king that's been put in place by the gods. You see what Genesis 1 is saying?

You're all the image of God, slave and free. Every single one of you has worth and dignity. This is a story that they hadn't been told yet. This is a story we take for granted.

Every single one of you is worth it, is worth something. He's saying that you're all kings and prophets and priests of this world. You have dominion over the world, God says.

[17 : 08] You're to profit his name before the world, to herald it, to speak it to the cosmos. And Adam and Eve lived in a garden that was also a temple.

They were priests. They walked with God in the temple of God, hand in hand, as friends. That human beings are the, he's saying that human beings are the kings and the prophets and the priests of creation.

Not fair, not just pharaoh, everyone, everyone. So here's the point of point one. The mission of God in Genesis 1 is to declare himself to be the God above all gods.

Now you've seen this before because if you read the Old Testament, you'll notice throughout much of the history of the Old Testament and the prophets that one of the ways the prophets talk when they conclude their passages is that where he count all the great deeds of God, this is what he's done for you.

This is what he's done for you. This is what he's done for you. And then what would they say? And he's done all these things so that you may know that he is the God above all gods.

[18 : 11] It's a constant refrain throughout the Old Testament. Listen to Deuteronomy 4. You are shown these things so that you might know that the Lord is God and besides him there is no other.

This is what, this is the mission of God. So that you would know. So that you would know that God is God above all gods.

Above every single God we create. Above every single God of the ancient myths that he is the God above all gods. And the second thing is that our mission is to be his image.

Our mission, you are God's image so go be God's image. That's the narrative of Genesis 1. All right.

Secondly, the irony of God's mission and our mission. We come to Genesis 3. Genesis 3 explains the history of the failed mission of humanity.

[19 : 16] That they were the image of God and they were called to image God but they failed. They were called to be kings, prophets and priests in the garden and they failed at their kingship, prophecy and priesthood.

Genesis 3 explains the fundamental psychology of humankind throughout all the generations. That's what we think is Christian. Genesis 3 explains exactly who we are.

Adam and Eve chose not to image God but to be God. That's the fundamental choice they make in the garden. They chose not to image God but to be God.

And this passage explains the history of death, disaster, destruction, disease, domination, all the terrible deeds of our lives. This gives the explanation for it all.

And there are two great ironies. There's an irony about our mission and there's an irony about God's mission. Here's the first irony. The irony about our mission. When human beings try to become more like God, they become less like God and they become something less than truly human.

[20 : 28] When human beings try to become more like God, they become less like God and they become less than truly human. So if you look at me, what would be at verse 5, 3 chapter 5, you can see this.

For God knows that when you eat of the fruit, your eyes will be opened and you will be like God knowing good and evil. So that's the serpent's message to Eve.

God knows that if you eat of the fruit, you will be like God. You see what he's saying? Do you want to be like God? That's what he's asking Eve. Do you want to be more like God than you already are?

You are the image of God, but do you want to be more like God? In other words, do you want to become God knowing good and evil? And as you read the text, the goal is to look at the text and shake the Bible and say, Eve, you already are like God.

You were created in this image. You already are like God. You can't be more like God than you already are. You don't do it. You see the temptation is to become God.

[21 : 31] And then what does that make them? Verse 7, when humanity tries to become God, the eyes of both become opened and they knew that they were naked.

So they sewed fig leaves together and they made themselves loincloths. It's not as they become naked.

That's what happens. It's not as if all of a sudden Adam says, oh man, I'm naked.

He was always naked. He never had any clothes on. Nakedness is not simply a reference to not having clothes. He never had clothes, but it's a reference to realize it's a consciousness.

He became aware of something, of something that had not previously been there that caused him to hide.

[22 : 29] It's this, before sin, being naked meant being truly known, being truly exposed for exactly who they were Adam and Eve.

They walked hand in hand in the garden with their friend, the God of Israel. They were truly known by him, truly naked. They could walk with him because they were like him, you see.

But when they choose to become God, they become less like him and no longer can they stand exposed for who they are before his presence. They've lost their goodness. Let me think about it like this.

If you get invited to a black tie party and you wear a black tie, or if you're a female and you wear a cocktail dress like you're supposed to, when you get there, you feel good.

You feel beautiful. You feel exactly like you're supposed to feel. If you get invited to a black tie party and you wear your bathing suit and you walk through the door and you're wearing your, guys, you're wearing your swim trunks, you don't have a shirt on, maybe flip flops, what happens?

[23 : 37] Immediately you're exposed. You feel completely naked. Everybody in the room immediately turns and looks straight at you. You have to run, you have to hide, you have to go straight to the bathroom.

You have to get out of there. You can't let these people, you become vulnerable and everyone else becomes your judge. The same thing is going on here with Adam and Eve's nakedness.

Because they're sinned, they become known. They become exposed for who they are, no longer good, no longer holy, no longer righteous. The only thing they can do is they're forced to go hide behind a bush.

This explains so much of who we are. One commentator talks in this passage about the famous philosopher in the 20th century, Jean-Paul Sartre, in France who wrote a book called Being and Nothingness.

And in Being and Nothingness, it's a great philosophy of conversation. And in Being and Nothingness, there's a chapter called The Look. The Look. And in The Look, there's a man and he's looking through a keyhole of a door at another man and he can see everything the man does in his life.

[24 : 49] He's looking through a keyhole and the man that's looking through the keyhole fills completely in charge as a judge. And the man on the other side is completely vulnerable, completely naked, completely exposed before him.

The man knows exactly who that man is, all of his secrets. My wife and I, we were in youth ministry prior to coming here for a little while.

And one of the things that one of our pastors always talk about is that every one of our kids had the same psychology in some ways. So every time they would walk into a room, they would do one of two things.

They would immediately scan the room and try to figure out how they were better than everybody else in the room. The males would look around and identify all the alpha males and think, I know I'm better than him somehow.

And all the girls would come in and say, how am I prettier than every other girl in this room? How am I more confident? How am I going to get the guy better? You see, everyone, it's human psychology. We all come in the room and the first thing we do is we play judge.

[25 : 54] We don't want to be known for who we are. We don't want to be exposed. So we come into the room and the first thing we do is play judge. And the same thing happens in gossip.

What's gossip? Gossip is the great act of becoming the judge over your neighbor, belittling them in such a way just enough to protect yourself from vulnerability, to protect the person that you're talking to from knowing truly who you are, setting them down just enough to set yourself up just enough so that you don't actually have to face the fact that you're the exact same.

Sartre, at the end of that chapter, he talks about this. It's not just that a man's looking through a keyhole and judging the next guy, but the man at the end of the chapter comes to find out something and he finds out that somebody is actually looking at him through a keyhole as well.

And the next guy finds out that somebody's looking at him through a keyhole and him through a keyhole and him through a keyhole. And it's an infinite regression that everybody's completely exposed and you see what Sartre is saying? That there's a God of all the universe.

There's an infinite regression to the God that sees all, that knows all. That Adam and Eve are trying to hide behind a bush, but it's not going to work. They're completely exposed. They're completely naked. Because of what they've done, God has come into the garden and he's no, he shouldn't be their friend.

[27 : 27] He's become their judge. Now, the second and final, very quickly irony is this.

God ought to have come into the garden in a storm of total wrath. He ought to have come into the garden and ripped the bush and exposed Adam and Eve for their utter nakedness.

But how does he come? How does he come? He comes quietly. He comes asking questions. He asks them three questions.

Where are you? Why are you hiding from me? Who told you you were naked?

He should have come in a storm of wrath, but here's the irony. The God of creation, ex-nihilo, the God who created everything from nothing, the God above all gods, the mission that you're supposed to know that God is greater than all gods.

[28 : 29] He comes in and says, where are you, my friends? Why are you hiding from me? Why will you not come out? You see what he wants them to do? He wants them to confess.

He doesn't come to them as judge. He comes to them as friend. And immediately Adam just responds by saying, she did it.

The woman, the woman did it, complete blame shift. And even then, even still, even still, he's come to them and give them a chance to confess. They blame shift and then Genesis 3.15.

Look at me with Genesis 3.15. I will put enmity between you and the woman, between your offspring and her offspring. He shall bruise your head and you shall bruise his heel.

Genesis 3.15 is a promise. It's the promise of a seed, a seed born from a woman, of a baby, a baby to be born.

[29 : 30] Here's what Genesis 3.15 is saying. When humanity came before God and said, I will not be like you. I will be you. I will write my own script.

I will be the author of my own story. God comes to humans and says, I will become something less than God. I will become like God because you never would have been.

You see? That's the promise of a baby. And even of a little boy born in Bethlehem. And even more than that, even more than that, God became man in order to be stripped naked precisely because none of us would come out from behind the tree where we were trying to hide our nakedness.

God came to all of us and said, why are you hiding from me? Come out and confess. And you see what Genesis 3.15 is about? It's the promise that the only way to get you to come out from behind the tree is that a God man had to come himself and be stripped naked and hung on a tree.

His clothes were ripped. He hung on the cross in utter nudity, utter shame precisely because you and I constantly try to hide the shame, hide exactly who we are from him.

[30 : 58] We've rejected what we were made to be, the image of God. We wanted to be like God. And so God had to become like us. The questions that God comes to us, comes to Adam and Eve, were the questions for all of us today.

Where are you? Why are you hiding from me? You have to answer that. Why are you hiding from them? Why are you hiding behind the gossip, behind the religiosity, behind the utter boredom with Christianity that you experience?

Why are you hiding? He's saying that in Jesus Christ, because he was hung and stripped naked on the tree, you have a chance to finally step out from behind the tree you're hiding from from God.

The question is, will you come out? Will you come out from behind the tree? Will you come before him? He wants your confession.

And he says that if you will come to him and that if you will confess, he will not come to you as judge, but he will come and put clothing over your nakedness.

[32 : 12] He will give you a robe, a robe of glory, and your mission will be restored. Will you come out from your hiding? Let's pray. Father, we ask that you would help us to see who we truly are, that we hide from God and our sin, that we're naked and that we're ashamed.

Lord, we confess together today that we are sinners in need of Jesus Christ. And so we ask that you would confine to us now so that we may be found. And we ask for this in the name of Jesus.

Amen.