



Understanding Mission

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Session 3 - Three Spheres of Mission - Church, Society, Creation - Global and Local Ideas (Transcript)

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In association with Langham Partnership

Good. So our first part of this, God's whole mission for God's whole church was called One Story that is trying to integrate all our thinking about mission around the one great story of the Bible and taking the Bible as a whole.

So that was what this morning was about, and we're moving on now in this afternoon session to one mission. And again, the theme I want us to really grasp is integrating, holding something together, holding together our practice of mission around the centrality of the gospel.

And I do that as I said earlier, because mission is such a vast topic and in many respects, quite controversial. People have very different views on it, disagreements about it.

I really want to say that the thing I believe passionately is that we shouldn't be, as Jesus might have put it, pushing us under what God has joined together.

Because it does seem to me that God has given us a very big job to do with many different dimensions, but it all coheres around something at the center.

Paul loves that phrase in Greek. It's the whole thing, all things in heaven and on earth, under Christ. And as I said earlier, when Paul talks about the will of God, he's talking about God's great plan and purpose.

So the good news then of the biblical gospel is that God has this plan for the salvation of the world and the redemption of creation. That is very good news, indeed.

And it, it's more than just the good news that you're a sinner and you can get saved and, and you can have eternal life, which is at also in the heart of the gospel.

That is what we share with people, but we share that with them to say, come and join this big story. When you become a Christian, when you join into what God has done for you, it's not just you and God in heaven.

It's you and God and a whole lot of other people through 2000 years of church history. In fact, about 4,000 years, go back to Abraham in God's big story, come and be a part of that.

That's the mission of God, and that's the story we're in. Now, how many of you have heard of the Lausanne movement? Oh, good. This is Northern Ireland. So I suppose, you know, you're a bit more up with these things here than usually in England.

There's a few maybe, you know, but, you may remember that in 2010, the Lausanne Movement held their third Great World Congress Congress, third Lausanne Congress on world evangelization, and they produced this little document called the Cape Town Commitment which I was involved with as part of the theological team that was, was doing it.

Well, that's evangelism. Two, to teach, baptize and nurture new believers. So there is the work of teaching and discipling, and three, to respond to human need by loving service works of compassion, love, mercy Ministries.

Four, to seek, to transform unjust structures of society, to, to seek justice in the world as God does, and fifthly, to strive to safeguard the integrity of creation and sustain the life of the Earth or creation responsibility, because that's where God has put us.

Now I would want to say that those five marks, several things I wanna say about that. First of all, I would want to say that if we are involved in these areas of activity, evangelism, teaching compassionate justice, we are participating with God because these are the things that God Himself is actively at work in doing.

God is evangelizing before we get there. It is God, the Holy Spirit, who is teaching people the truth in the Lord Jesus Christ. It is God who defines Himself as the God of compassion in exodus.

And justice is the very foundation of His throne, and it is God who loves everything that he has made according to the Psalms. So when we are involved in these areas, we are doing something that God wants to be done and is already doing.

In many ways, it is participating with God's mission. But another thing I'd want to say is that I do believe that all five of these marks of mission can be linked in some cases directly or indirectly to the Great Commission.

Those words at the end of Matthew's Gospel where Jesus says, all authority is given to me. So go make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son of the Holy Spirit and teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you, and I will be with you always to the end of the age.

And first of all, He didn't even start with the command. He started with a statement, all authority in heaven and earth is given to me. He begins with the foundation stone, which is the cosmic Lordship of Christ.

It's because Jesus is Lord, that we have any authority, any right at all to go and make disciples in His name. And so all of these things that we do is because of His lordship.

We build the church because Jesus is Lord of His church, but also we serve society because Jesus, not Caesar or any of Caesar's successors right through to the presidents and prime ministers of today.

Jesus is Lord of society whether they recognise it or not. In Revelation chapter one, Jesus says about Himself that He is the ruler of the kings of the earth.

It is Jesus who is Lord and sovereign. That's what these first Christians went out into the Roman Empire to say, Jesus was the great Christ. Caesar is Lord said, no, no, Jesus is Lord.

That's the affirmation over the Roman Empire by this bunch of, you know, unimportant Christians, believers Christians was a nickname that they got because they were so passionate about Christ and Jesus that they were nicknamed Christ freaks or whatever that word christiano quite means before it really came to even mean Christian.

So we serve society because Jesus is Lord of the world, and we care for creation because Jesus is Lord of heaven and earth, and the earth is the Lord's and everything in it, as He says at the very beginning of His of the great commission.

And so when the apostles or mark in his gospel say the good news, the gelian of Jesus of Nazareth, Messiah, son of God, you, you sit up and you listen.

And if you're a Roman pagan, you would say, what's this good news about? Some king called Jesus? What happened to him? Or if you're a Jew, you would be thinking good news.

Yeah, I heard that back in Isaiah. Because he talks about how beautiful on the mountains are the feet of those who proclaim good news. And if you are a Greek speaking Jew, that was the word that was used.

It was evangelizing was Isaiah's word for proclaiming good news, that there was good news that God had come and he was going to redeem his people and say Jerusalem and so on.

So this word basically means sharing good news. And that's why on the screen it says the good news of what God has promised and what God had accomplished through Jesus.

It's telling the world, Hey, there's good news. The one God who created this world, this God promised through our people, the people of Israel thousands of years ago, promised that He was going to bring blessing and salvation to this world.

And He's now done it through his own son, Jesus. Jesus of Nazareth. And this Jesus of Nazareth, he was crucified. What? That's a bit of a problem. A crucified good news. Yes.

Yes, you do have to have the hub in the wheel, and it does have to be connected to the engine, but it also has to be integrated with the rim or the tire, which is where the rubber hits the road, okay?

The actual context that you want to drive in. And there's no good just having a hub spinning around and round doing nothing. It's no good just having a tyre which will roll around like a hoop and fall over.

You have to have the integration. And I'm trying to suggest, although it's not a biblical metaphor, but I'm trying to suggest that our mission is a bit like that. It's the engine, which is the power of God to salvation.

The gospel is what God has done, and God's salvation is what drives our mission. But that what God has done has to be communicated, as it were, the centrality at the hub.

But that hub has got to be then connected with where we are in the world with all the social reality, all the suffering, all the evil the gospel has to be embodied, integrated with, with how we live in the world.

And that's what we have, that integration. That's why, again, why I use that word, integration between the gospel as the facts, the story, the God-centered story and the embodiment of that in word and deed in the world.

So that's evangelism. And in many ways, of course, it is the first thing that Jesus said, make disciples, baptizing them in the name of the Father, son Holy Spirit, because you've told them the story.

And there we read from Acts chapter 19 and 20, that Paul's presence. And Ephesus led that community from a group of 12 believers that's, he meets, when he gets there, there are 12 disciples.

And by the end, when he's back with them on a journey back to Jerusalem, there are elders of house churches around the city. The community has multiplied. There's even been a riot.

And there's been all sorts of things going on in Ephesus, because Paul was teaching and he says in Acts 20 to the elders of the churches in Ephesus, he said, I did not hesitate to teach you whatever was needful for you both publicly and house to house.

That's Acts 20, verse 20. And then he adds a little later, and I didn't hesitate to teach you to preach to you the whole council of God, the whole will and plan of God.

He'd made sure that they knew the whole scripture. And you can tell that when you read Ephesians, because he's writing to people who clearly knew what he was talking about when he refer to all the depth of biblical teaching that he builds into that letter.

So Paul himself was a church planter and a church teacher. But where he couldn't do it, he made sure that somebody else was. So you look at his

team, his missionary team, and includes people like Timothy and Titus, and you know how he urges them in first and second Timothy and Titus to be teachers, teachers of the truth that leads to godliness.

The opening verse of Titus, or, and I love this guy Apollos, that's why I've made him bold up there. I sometimes see Apollos as the patron saint of the Langham Partnership because we try to do exactly what, what he did.

In other words, that what seminaries do they need to be thinking that seminaries Bible colleagues need to be thinking, how do we serve the mission of the church? We exist for the sake of the church, for the sake of God's mission, not just to be part of academia and all of that.

And I, I believe that very strongly, that's one reason, as I said, why I believe that what the Langham Partnership seeks to do with its serving of literature, with providing help for seminaries, with training doctoral candidates who will teach and so on.

That is mission. It's part of what God calls us to do in the Great Commission. I felt quite cross one time when I was trying to explain what Lanham is and does to a lady in a church after a service.

And it's not that easy sometimes to explain what Lanham is and does. It's so diverse. It takes people a while to get it. But I was trying to explain all this, you know, scholars, books, blah, blah, blah.

And she said, oh, so you're not really a missionary organisation then, are you? And I knew what she meant, but I felt quite cross inside.

I nearly said, haven't you read the Great Commission, you know, line three and teaching them that the teaching theological education part of the church's life and ministry is an essential part of building up and maturing the church in order to serve God's purposes in the world.

So I didn't say all that to her, but that's what I'm saying to you, what I would've said to her. And I think that was, you see, that was what John Stott saw very clearly because whatever else you think about John Stott, he was an evangelist from 17 years old to his deathbed, quite literally.

Or Matthew 23, verse 23 the next line on the screen, where do you remember Jesus was having a go at the Pharisees as He did from time to time.

And he said, you know, you guys are fantastic. You know, you really, really obey the law to the very smallest thing. You tithe your dill and cummin, you know, you the little spices and you chop it up into 10.

And he said, that's great, but you're neglecting the weightier matters of the law. The really heavy stuff in the Torah are, and what did Jesus say that is? He said, justice, mercy, faithfulness says Jesus.

That's what really matters. Here's Jesus himself talking about what He wanted them to do. And almost certainly in that He's probably following up on Micah chapter six, verse eight, where God had said to the Israelites that God has shown you a man that He wants, what He requires, which is to do justice and love mercy and walk humbly with your God.

So this is the kind of ethos and language of the gospel of Matthew, which has then come into its climax in Matthew 28, where Jesus says, now go teach your disciples to obey all that I've commanded you.

You need to be living like this and this is how you must teach others to live. And I think that's what lies behind His expression. You are the light of the world.

You do you remember how he said that to his disciples? Must have been a bit of a shock, don't you think? There you are a bunch of ex fishermen and uh, a tax collector who was a colluded with Rome and a former terrorist, Simon, the zealot.

And then a few verses later, it says, but there will always be poor people among you because you won't obey me. And so you're going to have to follow these laws.

It's both ideal and realistic. So when Jesus says, do you remember in the gospels there will always be poor people among you, he doesn't mean so forget it. There's nothing you can do about it, which is the way that verse is sometimes quoted at us.

Oh, there'll always be poor. No, geez, there'll always be poor. So you need to do something about it. Not necessarily do what this woman has done, but there'll always be poor.

There'll always be a call for this kind of care and love. And then you go out further into the New Testament and you say, well, what again about the Apostle Paul seen how he was committed to teaching discipling.

It's also interesting that he had commitment in this direction as well. Now here's a question. What was Paul's first missionary journey? Now, if you were brought up like I was with maps at the back of the Bible then you got that lovely multicolored ones, his first journey, second journey the third, and enter Romans.

So in the end, and we were always told that his first missionary journey was Acts chapter 13, when the church in Antioch under the instruction of the Holy Spirit send Saul of Tarsus and Barnabas off, first of all to Cyprus and then to Galacia and so on.

That was actually not the first time that the church in Antioch sent Saul and Barnabas under the influence of the Holy Spirit on a journey. The first is in chapter 11.

And maybe again, without wanting to be controversial, but just to say that this is where I myself find an area of disagreement with those who do want to say that the great commission is only about the ministries of evangelism and teaching.

That that's really all that's included for the church in the great commission. And there are some who teach that. And at one level, I respect their commitment to evangelism.

And I keep on wanting to say, please don't read anything or that I write or say as implying that I'm undermining or underplaying the importance of the gospel and the centrality of the word.

Of course, I don't. It's absolutely at the core of all that we do is because there's good news which needs to be shared. But it seems to me illogical to say that the Great Commission is only about the ministry of evangelism and teaching when Jesus says, teach them to obey all that I commanded you.

And that cannot only include, go and evangelize. It must include the other things that Jesus had to say about compassion, about love, about loving your neighbor and so on, and caring for the poor and the needy and feeding the hungry and the sick, what he says in the parable of the goats, cheapen the goats and so on.

So that's maybe a little bit polemical, but I do feel that that's how I read this balance of the scripture around these things. But we need to move on. And I'll try to finish before too long 'cause I'm already going far too long.

Okay? Yes. What I wanted to do was just to read two statements which try to capture this. And as we've been told, these notes this video and the PowerPoints and so on will be shared with you later.

And I think three times heaven and earth. He's talking about the whole creation. And he says, it's all created by Christ and for Christ. And also he says, it has been redeemed by Christ.

He says, God's fullness, wealth in Christ, bodily and in him through Jesus to reconcile to himself all things in heaven and earth through His bloodshed in the cross. That's incredible. You think of the cross and you think of me and my sin, Jesus bore my sin on the cross.

Hallelujah, thank God. But when Jesus said, it is finished, it is accomplished. He wasn't just thinking of me or you. Of course He was, but He was accomplishing God's purpose for the whole of creation.

He was reconciling the world to God. And that is beyond my imagination. But it's what Paul means when he says that all creation is reconciled to God through the blood of Christ's shed and the cross, it's cosmic not just personal, and therefore all creation is included within God's plan of redemption.

And that's not just then Colossians that is actually risen through the Bible. Isaiah chapter 65 talks about God creating a new heavens and a new earth. That's where the John gets the phrase from Psalm 96, as has said, talks about God coming in the whole creation, rejoicing before God because he's coming to judge the earth.

Romans eight, a wonderful passage. Nothing can separate us from the love of God and Christ. We love those verses. But the earlier verses talk about how the whole of creation is groaning and say, yeah, creation is groaning, but Paul says it's groaning with the pains of childbirth.

It, it's because the, the new creation is being birthed within the womb of the old creation. It's a wonderful image. It's incredibly powerful to think that we, as Paul says, if anyone is in Christ, new creation is already there.

And that gives a missional dimension to all of the church's activities. But then there's also missional intention, which is where we say, right, well, let's then go and actually plan something to do in our context, whether it's an evangelistic mission or door to door visiting or setting up a food bank.

We want to plan to be intentionally missional in our community, in our local area, and we will do that specifically, but while we're doing that, we'll also be meeting together, worshiping together, praying together, and so on.

So I wanna suggest that we need to think as a church in that way, and that might therefore mean that we may need in our local churches to do what I've called a mission audit with a local church.

In other words, do we, especially if any of us here are pastors or with local church responsibility, do you teach your church the reason why they exist? Asking the question, why do you come to church every Sunday?

What's the point of being this church? Are we connected in some way to God's mission? And then is your missional thinking as a church connecting all the dots around those five marks of mission?

And again, I don't mean that you've just gotta say, right, we give 20% to every one of them. No, what we mean is yes, are we doing evangelism? Are we discipling? Are we also engaged in our local community and showing the love of Jesus and compassion?

Are we sometimes being a voice for the voice that's in the local council or speaking up for those who can't speak themselves and seeking justice? And are we doing what we should be doing in terms of ecological responsibility and so on?

It doesn't mean we do everything all the same, but are at least thinking of these different areas as we plan our work together. So are we integrating all that we do?

No, no, God is saying, oh, you know, discipleship is for the whole of life. It's not some sacred divide. And this is something which again, as evangelical Christians, we've lost sight of.

It was a huge emphasis of the reformation by Martin Luther and others that all of life is as it were, under the authority of God. All of life can function as ministry and service for God.

Even the slave says Paul in Colossians, even a Christian slave of a pagan master, Paul says, remember, it is the Lord Christ. You are serving God by serving him.

It's incredible. So do you think of that in your daily work, that it's all serving of God in our different lives and callings? So let me finish then that

what I think this is telling us is that the great commission is to say Jesus is Lord of all of life.

Every sphere of life. He's the Lord of the streets as well as the church. He's the Lord of the hospitals and the housing and the governments, the sports, the culture all the time and space.

He's Lord of all. Therefore, there is no place, there's no occupation, there's no situation in which as a disciple of Christ, I'm not there in that sense to represent him and to seek, to be bearing witness to him.

And that I think is something that challenges all of us. So mission then, it's not some kind of agenda which we manage as a specialised task by people who will pay to do it for us, mission is the mode of existence for the whole life of every member of God's whole church.

That's why the church exists to serve God's purposes in the world. And so may God help us to say, where do I fit? What's my part in that? Thank you.

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