

The Mission of a Missional Community

a sermon in the series
A Gospel-Oriented, Mission Driven, and Community-Centered Church

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John 17:18

As You sent Me into the world, I also have sent them into the world.

John 20:21

So Jesus said to them again, "Peace to you! As the Father has sent Me, I also send you."

We are discussing what a New Testament church is to be like. Thus far we have stated that it is to be a Gospel-oriented group of believers. That simply means the Gospel permeates everything about them, it influences and motivates everything they do. Their whole lives, individually and corporately, revolve around the Gospel. We've also learned it is a community-centered group of believers.

Community means believers coming together to live their lives in a biblical dependency upon each other, interacting with each other through food, relationship, and their lives for the advancement of the kingdom of God. In that statement there is an ultimate objective—the advancement of the kingdom of God. That's what the church is. It's a committed group of people who have covenanted their hearts together to further the agenda of God.

Without this mission dominating the rationale and purpose of the community's existence, the community will not survive. This is true of any community either spiritual or secular. They have to have a purpose, a reason for existence, greater than the group itself. This is a sociological truth. While there are groups of people who get together, including families and friends, and have identity one with another, if they don't get together for a reason greater than the group itself, the group cannot survive—it has no reason to do so.

Life will come and send us in every direction. Look at our families, isn't that true? You rear your children, they leave the nest, they marry, have their own children, and they have their own separate lives. That's the way life works.

If a community, whether it is a church or a small group within the church, believes it exists for a reason outside of itself, it will flourish. The community has to have an objective greater than itself in order to live. I saw this dramatically one day while I was watching a documentary on World

War II and the “Greatest Generation,” as they are called. They were interviewing soldiers who fought in World War II together. I’ve shared this illustration before because it has had such an impact on me, so you might recognize it. The soldiers said the common goal of defeating the enemy was such a great objective that it so knitted them, bonded them, that they were truly a band of brothers. The association they had with each other was on a level that in some ways was deeper and closer than their wives whom they had loved for years.

They didn’t mean they loved their fellow soldiers more than their wives but that the purpose they held in common—freedom—was so important that it created a connection on such a deep level that that connection existed even decades after the war had ended and they achieved their objective. There has to be a purpose greater than the group itself if that group is to thrive and flourish. And if it doesn’t, if it becomes all about being a community, then God’s life source will be missing.

We’re going to start missional community groups in January, and we are so pleased by the response we received in just one Sunday, but if our purpose is simply to say, “We have small groups now, we’re doing it! Bully for us! We’re doing something. We’re doing what we’re supposed to do!” If the purpose for our existence is just to have small groups, then God’s blessings will not be upon it because the objective of the group is the group and not something greater than the group. Churches and small groups have to have a reason to be other than to be. If all we do is get together so we can enjoy one another and love one another more and that is all our purpose is, then we have missed the New Testament and we have missed what it means to be a church and the life of Jesus.

All those things should happen but if that’s all that happens, it’s completely inwardly focused and has no objective other than itself. There has to be something greater than the group to give that group purpose. Self is not sufficient. We have been given a mission. Like individual soldiers, we have been given a mission and the Lord Jesus Himself was given that mission. We are a people on a heavenly-ordained and decreed mission.

I think this is one of the reasons our young people are so filled with hopelessness. Generations before have always experienced a degree of hopelessness, but not like this generation. Events that have taken place in Paris this week has only accentuated the fear and hopelessness and one of the reasons is because we have not given them something greater than themselves to live for. Yet our Lord has. He has commissioned all of His saints to do something greater than them that will take something beyond their own strength and abilities to do. Yet, in this commission there is a purpose and a reason for existence other than just existing another day on this planet. It is the reason for the meaning of life.

To make sure we understand, I want you to see that our text says that both Jesus and you are on mission.

I. Jesus Was On Mission

“As You sent Me into the world . . . As the Father has sent Me . . .”

Clearly Jesus was on a mission. He was sent by God the Father to accomplish something greater than Himself. How can that be? He's the Son of God. How can anything be greater than God Himself? It is true that He is the Son of God, and the man Christ Jesus possessed both the natures of deity and humanity and those natures never mixed. That means that Jesus' humanity was distinct from His deity. He was born and lived life as a man, just as normal a life as you and I are living.

How can one attach the word *normal* to Jesus? And the answer is He was a man. Period. The only exception is that He's a man without sin. But He's a man nonetheless. As a man, Jesus understood there was a mission given to Him that was far greater than Him. It was greater than to eke out an existence. This purpose was given to Him by His Father. Jesus the man lived for a purpose greater than Himself. He gave Himself completely to this task, this job assigned to Him by His Father, and that in itself is greater than Himself. He considered the mission so great He was willing to die for that cause, proving it was greater than His own physical existence on this earth. He was sent for a mission and that mission was greater than the man Jesus.

II. Jesus' Mission

His purpose was not to preach, His purpose was not to die, it was much larger than that. I know it's surprising to hear that Jesus' mission was not to die; most certainly it was a part of it, but it wasn't the ultimate thing. His mission was to do the will of the Father. Jesus' whole life can be summarized by His words, "I have come to do Thy will, O God." Jesus' whole life was about doing exactly what the Father had sent Him to do. It was not about Him, it was about His Father's business.

Even at the age of 12 He knew this. He had been separated from His parents for three days. Frantically they find Him in the temple and what does He tell them? "Did you not know that I must be about My Father's business?" He's on mission. He's on task. He hadn't been disobedient; He was perfectly obeying the task that had been given to Him.

Jesus was mission-driven. His mission was not just to preach the Gospel, heal the sick, or die on the cross; it was all of that and much more. It was to complete the work His Father had given to Him.

So He prays in this seventeenth chapter of John and says He completed everything the Father had commissioned Him to do. He had called these men, He had disciplined them, and now He was going to send them into the world as the Father had sent Him. His purpose was greater than even His death on the cross. It was His entire life lived according to the will of God.

Jesus filtered everything through this mission. This is the kind of purpose-driven life—if I can use that term—Jesus lived. Every decision He made was filtered through this mission. Does it advance it? Does it glorify the Father? Is this the business which He has sent Me to do? Everything was filtered through the mission. He did not do anything that did not advance that cause. Nothing could sidetrack Him. He was resolute. He was determined to fulfill the task that was given Him.

The Father's power therefore was with Him because He was on mission. This is the most unique thing about Jesus. He was a man and He was also God but He never did the things He did because He was God, He did them because He was a man filled with the Spirit of God. That means as long as Jesus was on the mission the Father, the Father's blessings of power and grace were upon Him.

One of the most remarkable things about our Lord's life was the power and miracles. The miracles were a direct result, not because He was God in the flesh, but His obedience to the mission. Could this be one of the reasons we are suffering a lack of the power of God? Could it be we're not about the Father's business like Jesus? Think about it. If the Father's power is granted to those on mission for Him, fulfilling His will, then it seems to me that if I am obedient to the will of God, His power and grace will sustain me. Everything I need to do what God has called me to do will be there because to those whom God calls God will equip with His power and grace. This is what you see in Jesus' life. He was focused like a laser on the Father's agenda. When He spoke, He said He was only repeating what He heard His Father say. What you saw Him do, He did as He watched what His Father did. He was completely into God's mission for Him. The reason He could do what He did was because the Father knew He was on task and He helped Him.

This is the secret to the life of Jesus. He was on mission. Don't attribute the miracles of Jesus to Him being the Son of God, attribute them to the real reason—He was a man on a mission. He was obedient to the task and He would not rest until He finished what He had been sent to do.

Can we go further and understand Jesus' mission? What was His mission? How would you describe it? I would do so in three ways.

A. It Was Testimonial.

He was sent by God to testify of God and glorify the Father. "The words I speak are the words I hear My Father speak." Even in this seventeenth chapter of John He begins by stating in verse four, "I have glorified You on the earth, I have finished the work which You have given Me to do." Do you hear the mission statement, the drive of Jesus? What's His purpose? To glorify God the Father. Everything Jesus did pointed back to the Father, the miracles, the teaching, even His death and resurrection. Why? Because you could not know God without this.

When you go back to the Old Testament and look at the prophets and some of the encounters they had with God, they were amazing, weren't they? Moses at the burning bush, Isaiah in the temple, Elijah. We read those experiences and say, "Oh, if God would only show Himself to me

like this, then my life would be useful and I would have purpose.” But do you know that as mighty and wonderful as Moses’ experience with God was at the burning bush it was incomplete? A lot was missing. There were many things Moses could not know about God even in that burning bush experience. In all the experiences of the prophets, none of them experienced God fully or completely. To them God was still an enigma.

God sends His Son into the world and He makes Him like one of us. He’s a baby born in Bethlehem, He grows up in Nazareth as any other child, He works as a carpenter following His Father’s trade. He’s a man. In this case, as a man He is showing us what God is like.

B. It Was Illustrative.

His life illustrated what God was like. Now for once man can see exactly what God would look like if He were a man. We don’t have to guess, we can see it, we can read about it in the Gospels. Watch Jesus. Do read the Gospels frequently! Don’t let many days go by unless you are there in the observatory of Jesus. Watch Him, listen to His words, ask why He said things He did, watch how He responds the way He responds. Learn Jesus. In doing so, you learn God. Jesus’ purpose and mission was to show us what God is like.

Many of you are hung up on the God of the Old Testament and the God of the New. You see God as a hard to please hard-nosed individual and then you see Jesus, the kind, compassionate, gentle Jesus. You want to know what God the Father is like? Look at Jesus. Jesus showed us the Father so you could know Him.

His mission was to introduce you to His Father so His Father could become yours. Salvation is a blessed thing but it is much broader than we first suppose. *Thank You, Lord, for forgiveness of sins. Thank You that I have no outstanding record against me.* But oh, how much more can we thank the Lord that He’s not only our God but also our Father? This was the mission of Jesus—to show us the Father. “If you’ve seen Me, you’ve seen the Father.”

C. Was Redemptive

Jesus has redeemed us by His blood. He said He hadn’t come to be served but to serve and give His life as a ransom for many. Jesus’ mission did include the cross but it’s His life before the cross that made the cross effectual. Jesus’ mission was not only to die but it was His entire life lived unto God. Had He not done that, He could have died on the cross and been resurrected and crucified and resurrected again, a thousand times over and His death would have no power to forgive us of our sins. It was the way He lived that made the cross effectual.

That means He’s come not just to redeem us of our sins but to show us how to live, which goes back to the illustrative part of His mission. How are you and I to live? We’re to live like Jesus lived. He is our example. Once again you go to the Gospels. You have to read and study the life of Jesus because there’s the model we’re supposed to follow. *How can I follow in Jesus’ footsteps?*

That sounds so impossible. It is. Thanks be unto God that with man it is impossible, but with God all things are possible.

What has God done? He's redeemed you. He's plucked you as a brand out of the fire through His death and resurrection. He has given you His very eternal life so that He can live His life through you. This is amazing. The Christian life isn't trying to imitate Jesus as much as it's Jesus' very self being expressed through you.

You say, *I find that theoretically true because it's in the Scripture but I find it practically difficult.* I agree. The reason it's difficult is because we have too much of self getting in the way. We want to do it, we want to perform, we want to act out our Christianity and please God but we seem so insufficient. However, when you understand that Jesus' mission was a selfless mission and you give yourself away, like Jesus, the Spirit will work in you to do amazing things.

He came to redeem us. Notice what He said in John 10, "I am the Good Shepherd, I lay down My life for My sheep." The Apostle Paul said it this way, "Jesus loved her and gave Himself for her," who is *her*? The church. Christians. His bride. Jesus' whole mission was involved in the redemption of sinners. Jesus came into the world to seek and to save that which was lost.

If you're not a Christian today, this mission has everything to do with you—He came into the world to save you. He had compassion upon His own creation. Without Him coming into the world and rescuing us we would have no hope of getting out of this world and getting to Him. He had to come to us and He has. By His death not only can you have the assurance that your sins are forgiven but more than that, and better than that, you can know Him personally. You can have interaction with God, a relationship with the living God. This is redemption, that you might know Him the One True God and Jesus Christ whom He has sent. He is not offering us religion or a life of goodness and good works, He is offering us His very life.

This is His mission—to give you Himself.

III. Our Mission

Jesus had a mission but He also said, "As the Father sent Me, so I send you." There is a mission for us. We are on mission as well, commissioned no less than Jesus. Your mission is as heavenly as Jesus' because it comes from the same source.

A. Our Mission is a Continuation of Jesus' Mission.

"As You sent Me into the world, I also have sent them into the world." (John 17:18)

So Jesus said to them again, "Peace to you! As the Father has sent Me, I also send you." (John 20:21)

What is our mission? To continue the mission of Jesus. It's important that you understand there is an intrinsic union between you and Jesus. You are connected to Jesus on the deepest and most important level, to the degree that Jesus considers you Himself. Jesus is looking at all of His children today and He's going, "There's Me sitting there. That's My finger, that's My nose, My toe, My arm, those are My legs. This is Me." The whole New Testament stresses with repetitiveness this idea that we are connected with Jesus. He uses many metaphors to explain that but none better than the body.

The Bible says Jesus is the head and we are the body. We know biologically the head is the control center of the body. The body doesn't do anything but what the head tells us to do. It controls the voluntary and involuntary motions of the body. The control center is the head and because that is true that means in the spiritual realm we are here on this earth to complete the mission of our head. What was His mission? To glorify the Father and do the Father's will, which includes being a testimony, an illustration of how we should live, and the redemption of sinners. Therefore, the mission of Christ continues in you and me.

What am I sent to do? I'm sent to do what Jesus was sent into this world to do. *Oh, Pastor, that's sounds too grandiose. You've been studying too much. Much learning has made you mad.* But listen to what the apostle says in I John, "As He is so are you in this world." You are the body of Jesus Christ and if the Spirit of Jesus lives within us then the mission of Christ continues. Why did He leave us here? He left us here to continue the task. There are more sheep to be redeemed. There are others to yet be saved and be brought in. Our mission is simple: continue the work of Jesus.

That means you are to be a testimony of Jesus Christ. As He testified of His Father, so you are to testify of Jesus. You are to be his witness. Our witness is to testify of Jesus, to tell of Him, to share what He's done, to speak of Him.

Secondly, we are to be an illustration to those in this world, just like Jesus was to us of how we live. How do you live the Christian life? You watch Jesus. *But I'm not perfect. I'm so far from Him and the longer I serve Him the less I feel like Him.* That's the experience of most godly people. We feel that because the more we know Him the more we see about Him and He's much larger to us than the day we were converted. Of course you feel that way. And of course you know yourself more as He's convicts you and reveals your flesh and sin to you.

I want to remind you again that it's not your perfection He's after. You don't illustrate Jesus by trying to be perfect. The issue is not you trying to be perfect. It's not in our perfection we illustrate Jesus, it's actually in our imperfection and weaknesses and, may I dare say, our sins that we illustrate the Gospel of Jesus. Yes, He was without sin and we are not, but the one thing Jesus could not show anyone how to do was He could not show anyone what repentance looked like. You can. You can show the world, even in your imperfections and weaknesses, what it looks like to truly trust Jesus for everything—every sin, blemish, blot—and what it looks like to know He will never reject you but always receive you.

Thereby our mission really does become redemptive. We are not going to die for the sins of the world; you can't save a single soul, not even your own, but your mission becomes redemptive as you tell about what Jesus has done. I want to remind you, "how shall they believe unless they hear?" Unless they see the Gospel demonstrated, unless they hear it explained by our lips, how shall they believe?

There's no choice about accepting this mission or not, either you do or you rebel. There's no other option. We either accept or reject it. And the mission is we go out into the world to reach sinners.

B. Our Mission Demands the Same Self-Sacrifice of Jesus.

The church cannot see itself as an institution created for itself. While only believers can make up its ranks, the church is not for Christians; it is for the world. It is for Christians in that only Christians can be part of the true church of Jesus Christ but the church doesn't exist for them but for the world. We are called to exist in order to go into the world and make disciples. That's why He's left us here. As long as we see that this church, those missional communities that will begin in January, is about us and helping us in our walk with God, growing in grace, and loving one another, I would rather we not even get started. That cannot be the purpose. The purpose is to reach the world for Jesus.

We do that by growing in grace and love for one another. The purpose is not for us.

C. Our Mission Demands A Sent Mentality.

We have to start thinking that we are sent just as Jesus was sent. Therein lies the problem. We don't think that way. We are dealing with deeply rooted concepts about what church and church life is. We don't think of ourselves as being sent, we think of Jesus as being sent to us and that's the end of it. But Jesus said, "As the Father has sent Me, so I send you."

For example, when we commission missionaries and send them out we see ourselves as the sending body and they're the ones going. That's completely false. But the reality is we are not a sending body but a body that is sent. We are the ones that have been sent therefore these people are going. I was thankful to hear how many of you responded to work in the warming center this winter because this church is to go into the community because we're sent to them. We need to change our thinking and instead of seeing ourselves as a body that Jesus came to die for we should see that He came to die for us in order that He might send us to complete His mission.

Asking people to come to a worship service is not what Jesus or the apostles did. They went to the sinners. They were missionaries who saw it their business to go to the lost and not wait for the lost to come to them. In the book, *The Missional Quest: Becoming a Church of the Long Run*, authors Briscoe and Ford state when we ask sinners to come to us that, "In a very real sense, we are asking those outside the church to become the missionaries."

When you just invite people to come and join us in our events, you're asking them to do all the work. You're asking them to get up and to go while you remain here. There is absolutely nothing wrong in asking people to attend worship service or any other event a church may host. I encourage you all to do this. You will never know if someone will say "yes" until you ask them. But the problem with inviting people to our events is that it becomes the primary purpose of the church. We think this is the sum total of evangelism. If this is our thinking, then we have missed seeing what God has done in the world around us and we will continue to miss it.

If our whole evangelism strategy is to attract people to us then we are not missional, we are not like Jesus, and we are not doing His business.

The question is, where is God working presently? Is He working in the church or is He working in the world? Well, the answer is both but observing His mode of operation is very important. God is working in the church so that He can do His work in the world. God works in the church for the ultimate objective of working out there. We're not the end goal, they are. Another way to say it is, God works in the world using primarily His church to accomplish His mission.

He's still on mission, it still exists and we are to go into the world with the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. Should we sit here and wait for the sinner to come to us? Well, we've been doing that. How fruitful has that been?

I want to bring this to a conclusion by giving you a biblical illustration. Jesus was sent on a mission that took Him into a world where everybody was totally different from Him. They were all sinners and He wasn't. How many of you have been feeling overwhelmed at work because everybody at work is a sinner and you're the only one whose saved or there are very few Christians? Now you know what Jesus was facing. He came into a completely strange work environment where there was no one like Him. Amazing. Notice what He does.

As Jesus passed on from there, He saw a man named Matthew sitting at the tax office. And He said to him, "Follow Me."

He didn't give him the four spiritual truths, He didn't give him the Romans Road, He didn't ask the sinner if he knew where he was going after he died, and He didn't ask him to pray a prayer. He just said, "Follow Me."

So he arose and followed Him.

Let me stop right there. There are people in this room who want to be a Christian. If you want to be a Christian, listen to me, don't listen to any thought or concept that tells you, "This is what you have to do..." Quit that. Just get up and follow Him. I've got Scriptural warrant to say what I just said. Just follow Him. *But I'm afraid I'm not going to follow Him very well, I'm afraid I'm going to fail.* Well, then join the rest of us! That's why we need each other.

You can't live the Christian life by yourself because you're going to fail. I need someone who will come and give me a text of Scripture and say, "I think this is what God's saying to us." I need brothers and sisters and so do you. God didn't call you to walk this walk by yourself. Come! Be a part of this mission God is on. Get up and follow Him. That's all you have to do. You don't have to stop all of your evil habits. *Wait a minute. You've told us we've got to repent.* You do. Absolutely. But if you're following Jesus you won't be doing the same things you used to because Jesus doesn't do those same things. Does that make sense? It's as simple as that. It's not about saying, "Okay, I've got to stop this and that and this," no. Go follow Jesus. That's your mission. Go do what He does, say what He says, go where He goes. The rest will take care of itself. He will see to it.

Now it happened, as Jesus sat at the table in the house, that behold, many tax collectors and sinners came and sat down with Him and His disciples.

They didn't watch their language around Jesus. They didn't watch their habits and behavior. They were raw, fresh sinners. How fresh were they? They were so raw and wicked and vile that the religious leaders were shocked He was doing this. These were not cleaned up sinners. These were not folks who put on Sunday go-to-meeting clothes trying to act the role and fit in. Not at all.

11 And when the Pharisees saw it, they said to His disciples, "Why does your Teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?" 12 When Jesus heard that, He said to them, "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. 13 But go and learn what this means: 'I desire mercy and not sacrifice.' For I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners, to repentance." (Matthew 9:9-13)

The Pharisees were demanding that Jesus act like a physician who shunned the sick. How could a doctor do his work if his policy was avoidance of patients? There is no way possible for a man of medicine to treat the sick if he doesn't see the sick. You can't just email your doctor and say, "These are my three symptoms. Would you please prescribe something?" Unfortunately there are some doctors who will do that, but not a good doctor. A good doctor knows there are general symptoms that can be evident for many types of diseases. There are different ailments that can manifest the same symptoms. He needs to see you to properly diagnose. He's been trained to look at your eyes, he can even look at your fingernails often and it be helpful in diagnosing. He has to see you if he's going to really treat you. In the same way, Jesus couldn't do His work of saving sinners unless He was with sinners.

It's the same for we who claim to be followers of Jesus. We can't fulfill our mission of demonstrating the love of God for sinners unless we are with sinful people. The first thing Matthew did after following Jesus was to throw a party and invite sinners, friends and family, who were in the same predicament he had been just a few short hours earlier. Jesus said, "That's the right idea, Matthew. I'll sanction it with My presence."

That's what God will bless. That's where His presence will be—where His mission is. We beg and pray, and rightly so, that when we gather here God's presence will be here. But do we pray to

join His presence where He is out there? We pray that He would join us and His presence be with us but do you realize that Jesus prays for your presence to be where He is in the world? His presence is with sinners.

When we gather in these groups, if the groups' purpose is just to get together with other Christians and have a good time and sharpen one another and help one another and that's it, we've not gone far enough, we've missed the mission of God and God's presence will not abide with us. But if we, as a collective group, learn that we've come together not only to help one another spiritually but for the ultimate purpose of continuing the mission of Jesus in the world, He will always be there and you will begin to discover a dynamic of spiritual relationship with God you have not hitherto experienced. Your group will become an instrument in the hand of God, a weapon wielded by His strength.

But if we say, "This is too frightening for me, I don't want to get out of my comfort zone. You're asking me to do things that I find quite unpleasant." The beauty is you'll be in a group, doing it together, not just trying to do it lone ranger style. Even if that still frightens you, I understand. But I want to make sure you understand that to not join Jesus on His mission, to be sent and go as He's sending you, is not "struggling with God's commandments," it's rebellion.

If you continue to rebel, the Bible is very clear. No one enters the kingdom of heaven who continually rebels against the Creator. This is very serious. This is not an optional thing. You've been saved and sent. Now go.

We're learning together. I'm still learning. But I know I've got to get out of this office. I have to get where sinners are so I'm going to start scheduling blocks of time to leave the office. I'm going to take my laptop or iPad and I'm going to go where sinners are, I'm going to sit in their midst and see what God will do. I'm going to go and trust God to do something. I don't know how to do it, I'm just being honest, but I'm going to do it. I don't want to rebel against my Lord. He's too good to be hurt like that. He's been too good to me. "As the Father has sent Me, so I send you." Go. Amen.