

Mission and Miracle

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[0 : 0 0] Thanks very much, Jackson. It was a good plan to get a class of history, the reading this morning with all these difficult names beautifully read. Thank you. Good morning, everyone. Really good to have you with us. If you're here in the church or to know that you're on YouTube watching us, you're very welcome. I want to start with another announcement, if I may.

This coming Saturday at Bellevue Chapel, which is in the Broughton area of Edinburgh, there's a missionary exhibition. Now, this exhibition is by Echoes International, which is the organisation that supports most of the missionaries we're associated with at Brunfield. They're celebrating the 150th anniversary. We're all worth going to, I think, if you're able to, and there's a short service with Stephen McQuade, Director General of Gospel Literature I-TREACH at 4 o'clock.

There's information in the newsletter as well. But if you go to Bellevue on Saturday, perhaps you'll find out the answer to a question which some people might ask, which is, what do missionaries actually do? When someone goes abroad, or indeed is a missionary in the UK, what is it that they do? What are the things that they focus on? And we're going to see that as we go through this passage, as we think about Paul's missionary work. But I want to begin by moving a little bit more modern, not very modern to begin with, but we'll come to that and ask the question, well, let's take some examples. What do missionaries do? These two fine folk on the screen are my grandparents, Archie and Alice Naismith. It's a before and after picture of when they were missionaries in India. They went out 100 years ago, this year, 1922, and they stayed there until 1958.

One of my great plans for my retirement is to do a bit more research into what they actually did during their time in India. But I can share a little of that with you to give a bit of a flavour this morning. Like all missionaries, my grandparents went out to tell people about Jesus, to communicate the great news that we're all sinners, that Jesus died for our sins on the cross at Calvary, and if we trust in him, we can be forgiven, we can have eternal life. My grandparents certainly gave that message. For example, on their voyage towards India, as they first went out, my grandfather held gospel meetings every Sunday, arranged them on the boat. And he also befriended a young man from Dundee, a young fellow by the name of Prescott, who had a lot of problems, issues in his life, problems with alcohol, among other things, and sadly died during that voyage. And my grandfather talked a lot to him about the gospel and his need for Jesus. He wasn't sure at the end whether he had trusted the saviour. But as they went to India, very much, they went to tell people the good news about Jesus. And that is what all missionaries go to do to a greater or lesser extent, to tell people to evangelise others. But there's a lot more to missionary work than that. Missionaries also encourage Christians. They may be established churches, or they go to churches already there, and they help to build Christians up in their faith and in their knowledge of the Lord Jesus.

My grandparents went to a place called Narsapur. Narsapur is kind of on the east side of India, kind of about halfway up on the east side. And they went to what was then an established church.

[3 : 32] There were already missionaries there. But a lot of my grandfather's work was going around relatively small churches in the area, several times a week usually he was preaching and teaching the Christians there and encouraging them in their work for the Lord Jesus. He travelled by road, he travelled by river, any way that was needed to encourage and build up the church.

And all missionaries, again, to a greater or lesser extent, are involved in building up Christians and helping them to grow in their faith in the Lord Jesus.

And then the other thing my grandparents went, and the reason why they went specifically to Narsapur, was they had heard there was a need for a headteacher in the school in that town.

And my grandfather went to be the headteacher. My grandmother was responsible for the hostel where the boys stayed. And during their most of their time in India, they looked after the needs of the boys in the school.

And that, I think, is the third major thing that many missionaries are involved in, is meeting the practical needs of those in the areas that they have gone to.

[4 : 43] So three things then. Share the gospel with others, encourage Christians in their faith, and show Christ's love in practical ways.

Let's get a bit more modern. What about the missionaries that we support as a church here at Plantsfield? Some of you will know them. Many of you probably won't. I'll only be able very briefly to mention names.

If you want more information, come to me later. But do they do these things that we're talking about here? Well, yes, they do. They share the gospel with others. All of them share the good news of Jesus.

For instance, Ebron Fionno and Paraná in Argentina have a daily radio broadcast where they share the gospel. And they organise young people's groups to go on mission campaigns around the country.

Or here in Edinburgh, a variable youth project. John and the team are very much involved in organising scripture union groups and groups for teenagers to teach them the gospel, to teach them and help them to understand the good news of Jesus.

[5 : 45] And I go through the whole list of missionaries. All of them seek to share the gospel with other people. Do they encourage Christians in their faith? Yes, they certainly do.

Jim, Fiona's father in Paraná in Argentina, spent over 40 years building up a church there, planting new churches and going round large areas in that part of Argentina and further afield, helping churches, helping the elders and preaching there, and also has an extensive writing ministry.

Richard and Elaine in Switzerland with YWAM are involved in discipleship training for those who want to be in Christian service. Derek, who used to be in a country where Christians suffer quite a lot of persecution, is still involved in publishing good Christian literature to go on to encourage the Christians.

He just finished publishing commentaries for every book of the Bible. And we could again give lots of other examples. And then missionaries show Christ's love in practical ways.

Going back to Eber and Fiona, they have a food kitchen where they provide food for those in need. Andrea and Tyre in Lebanon is an educational psychologist working in a Christian school.

[7 : 04] And in that country, which has been going through such dire economic and political circumstances, provides a huge amount of support for others. And again, I could go through more in the list of our mysteries.

And they show Christ's love in practical ways. So these are three things that missionaries today do. And they're three things that Paul was very much concerned with.

And we might come to this passage, and as Jackson was reading it, you might have thought, well, this is not very interesting. It's just names of people and places. What relevance does it have to us today?

And the answer is, the relevance is, Paul was sharing the gospel with others. He was encouraging Christians in their faith, and he was showing Christ's love in practical ways.

Now, some of it we learn, a lot of it we learn from what we read today. Some more we learn from what Paul wrote, particularly in two of his letters to the Corinthian church and to the church in Rome.

[8 : 03] So we're going to talk a little bit about that, and we'll draw some practical conclusions. And we will come to the amazing miracle. I'm not going to forget that. We will come to that and think about it. A bit of context first, though.

It's easy when we get into the details of cities and things that Paul went to to forget the big picture. So Paul went on three what we call missionary journeys. On this picture, the first of these is shown in red.

It's a relatively small area. So to the right of the map there, we have the Middle East, we have Israel, we have Syria, the two key countries from that point of view. Paul went from Antioch in Syria and returned to Jerusalem in Israel.

And he went along the south of what we would now call Turkey. The top of that picture, that map, is Turkey. And then the first missionary journey was a relatively small area visited with Barnabas.

And then they went back to Jerusalem and to Antioch. Second missionary journey is the one that is in blue on the chart. You'll see it's quite a lot bigger. They go right through Turkey and they end up going through Greece and then back again to Jerusalem.

[9 : 14] And then the third one is the one in purple. And again, it's a round trip starting in Antioch and ending up in Jerusalem. We transitioned seamlessly from the second to the third missionary journey last week.

I don't know if you noticed that. Paul had two visits to Ephesus and in the middle he returned to Jerusalem and to Antioch. So we started in missionary journey two and we ended in missionary journey three.

Now what did Paul do in missionary journey three? Well, the first thing he did was he went to Ephesus and that was what we were looking at last week. So the map on the left there, we see Paul, he's headed straight from Antioch and he's gone down to Ephesus.

I divided the map into two so we can see kind of where he goes and how he comes back as we go through it. So Paul, remember, spent several years in Ephesus at this point.

There was then a great riot in the city, which we thought about last week. And Paul at that point decided to leave. He said goodbye to the people there and he headed north.

[10 : 17] Now Luke says he went to Macedonia. Macedonia is Greece. It's a bit at the top of the map. Actually, we know from what Paul wrote that the first thing he did was go to a city called Troas.

Now he needed to go to Troas to get to Macedonia because that was where you got the boat from. But he actually went to Troas with a purpose. And that purpose, he says in 2 Corinthians, was to preach the gospel.

So he was going there to tell people the good news about Jesus. Now when he got there, he had a bit of a problem. He was expecting his friend Titus to meet him in Troas.

And he found that Titus wasn't there. And that was a source of great stress for Paul. Paul had sent Titus off to Corinth. Corinth is at the bottom of the map there on the left-hand side.

Paul had sent Titus off to Corinth. And with him he'd sent a letter. And it was a bit of a stinker. The church in Corinth had huge problems. And there were all sorts of things that Paul needed to pull them upon and correct.

[11 : 24] Now the letter he sent isn't one of the two letters to Corinthians that's in the Bible. It's one that he wrote in the middle. And Paul was really worried about how the Christians in Corinth would receive his message.

He was sending it to them to build them up, to encourage them in their faith. But in doing that, he had to pull them up on all the things that they were doing wrong. If you want to know what they were doing wrong, there's plenty of evidence in the two letters we do have in the Bible.

And the fact that Paul didn't find Titus in Troas was really stressful to him. And so stressful that he found he wasn't able to preach the gospel the way he'd have wanted to.

Now in a strange way, as I was studying for today, I found that really comforting. I've had a pretty stressful week. And at times I found it really difficult to concentrate on things I knew were important.

And I took comfort from the fact that Paul had a similar kind of situation, much worse than mine. But that in that situation, he also found he couldn't concentrate on what he knew was important.

[12 : 33] Don't beat yourself up if you're not able to do something in the Lord's service because of what's happening in your life. He understands and others have been there, including Paul.

Anyway, that was Paul in Troas. He was going to preach the good news of Jesus, and he didn't manage to. He then went across to Macedonia, which is now north part of Greece, and he went specifically to Philippi.

And the good news for him was he met Titus in Philippi, and he got the news that the Corinthians had received his letter well, that his concerns had fortunately not been realised.

The church had turned back to God and was trying to live as they should. And Paul wrote his second letter of Corinthians at that point, much encouraged, to encourage the church and to build them up in the gospel.

And then he went round all these churches, all these cities that Jackson read to us that we can see on the map. What was he doing there?

[13 : 37] Well, he was doing two things. One was he was going there to encourage them. That's what it says, doesn't it, in our passage. He travelled throughout that area, speaking many words of encouragement to the people.

We sometimes think of Paul as going from one city to another city to another city, preaching the gospel, and then moving on. Well, in a sense he did.

But he also took great efforts to ensure that when people came to know the Lord Jesus, that they were well supported, that they had every opportunity to grow in their faith.

Part of that was writing letters to them, but also a large part of it was going back to visit. And Paul here is going back to visit churches and cities that we've met previously in the book of Acts, and he's going to encourage the Christians in their faith.

Three times in this passage, the word encouraged is used in the original, in verse 2, in verse 3, and then towards the end in verse 12, it talks about the church being greatly comforted.

[14 : 44] The word there is encouraged. So Paul at this point was very much wanting to encourage Christians and to build them up in their faith. And that was part of what he was doing, a large part of what he was doing, as he went this slightly circuitous route to get from Ephesus and end up in Corinth.

But he was doing something else as well. And this brings us to the third thing I said that missionaries do, which is provide practical support for others. On his third missionary journey, Paul was very concerned that the Christians in the churches that he had helped to establish should support the churches in Judea, specifically in Jerusalem.

The Christians in Judea weren't well off. There was a famine there, and they needed physical help. And Paul saw the opportunity for the Christians in the churches in Greece and then was now Turkey to provide support, practical support, for the churches in Judea and specifically in Jerusalem.

So he was going around collecting from them what they had gathered together for the churches in Israel, providing practical support. Now, we have wondered what all the names were in this passage.

Who were these people? A lot of them we know virtually nothing about. But most likely, what they were was delegates from the churches that had collected money, who would go with Paul to Jerusalem and would give the money to the Jewish Christians there.

[16 : 22] That was a great opportunity for them to visit the place where the church had first been established, where the Lord Jesus had lived and died, and to see firsthand for themselves, and to enjoy fellowship with the Christians in Judea.

It also was a great opportunity for the Christians in Judea to meet them and to recognize that these Gentile Christians, these people from places far away, truly were believers in the Lord Jesus and really were following him.

So as Paul travels along, he is collecting money from the churches who have given generously, they have given sacrificially in many cases. He refers to that in the book of Philippians. And he is gathering up people who can go back to Jerusalem with them to take the money.

Eventually arrives in Corinth. We're not going to go too much longer on this geography lesson, but he eventually arrives in Corinth. And he stays there, almost certainly Corinth, he stays there three months.

Now churches, we believe in better shape. And Paul certainly is in good shape in Corinth because he has a big project he's working on when he's there, and that's writing the book of Romans.

[17 : 33] So the book of Romans was written at this point on Paul's missionary journey. It was sent from Corinth to Rome. And of course, Romans is Paul's great exposition on the Christian faith and on justification through faith in Jesus and all that means to us.

So it was written in the period we're looking at here. He then goes back the way he'd originally intended to sail from Corinth back to Israel. He wasn't able to do that because he discovered a plot against him.

And perhaps it's relevant at this point just to recognize that in the background of all this, there are Jews who are wanting rid of Paul who want to see him dead.

And maybe he got some word that on the ship there were those who might have tried to kill him, and so he prudently takes a different way back. Of course, he also had a lot of money on him, and that might have been attractive to people as well.

But Paul goes back, goes through the similar kind of places again. He goes through the interior of Greece, so there's a bit more gospel work going on there. Paul reaching out to cities that haven't yet received the gospel.

[18 : 40] And he goes back, and he comes back to Troas, and then goes on and sails down as described at the end of the passage. So as I said, Paul here is doing three things that missionaries do.

He's sharing the gospel with others. He's encouraging Christians in their faith. Encouraging just by being there, I think, given the dangers he was facing and the difficulties of travel.

Encouraging them by being there for them, but also encourage them with his words and his actions. And he's showing Christ's love in practical ways through the collection.

That's what missionaries do. It's also what we should all do, isn't it? If we know the Lord Jesus, these are the basic things that we as Christians should be involved in and should be active with.

We should be sharing the good news about Jesus with our friends and with others we come into contact with. We should be encouraging one another in our faith.

[19 : 44] Now, encouraging here doesn't just mean saying to someone, well, Dan, you did a really good job there, though that's important. It is also at times helping them to understand where they're going wrong or explaining the scriptures to them and just building them up in their faith as Christians, as Paul did.

And we should be showing Christ's love in practical ways. Sometimes in helping the poor, things like the food bank or care van. Sometimes in showing concern to those who are unwell, perhaps visiting or meeting people for coffee or whatever.

In practical ways, helping people with their daily life. So all of us should be doing that. It's not something that just missionaries do, although they undoubtedly do.

It is something for you and for I to be involved in. And there's one other thing we're going to come to show us now. The other thing is that we meet together as a church.

Very important that we come together to worship, to pray, to learn. I know there are some people who can't, and it's great that we have the facilities to be able to allow them to watch our services.

[20 : 56] But very important, if we can, that we come together as church, that we enjoy fellowship with one another, that we learn and we worship together. So let's go to Troas now, and we'll be fairly brief.

But let's look at what's happened there in the middle of our passage. So Paul and his companions, which now includes Luke. Luke wasn't there in the early part of the passage.

It now includes Luke with Paul. They come to Troas, and what they want to do is to meet with the church on the first day of the week to break bread. Two things there that I think are significant.

One is they met on the first day of the week. That seemed to have become the pattern for Christians. Sunday wouldn't have been a day off for most of the church. They would have been working before they came. But they were in the habit of meeting together on Sunday.

And we see that here. We see it also when Paul writes to the Corinthians, that that was their habit as well. So good together to come to church on the Lord's Day to think about him.

[21 : 56] But they came together, Luke says, to break bread. That was the key purpose of why the church met. Now, break bread is a slightly ambiguous phrase when we come across in the book of Acts.

It occurs in two separate places, once in chapter 2 and in this passage here. In both cases, it's mentioned twice. Breaking bread can just mean having a meal together. So part of what was happening here was that the Christians were coming together and they were sharing a meal and enjoying fellowship over it.

Great way we could share meals together. Church meals together are wonderful, and also meals in homes can be terrific as well. So part of the meaning of breaking bread is meeting for a meal.

But I don't think that can be the main meaning in this passage. They came together to break bread. That was the purpose of them coming. So the second meaning of breaking bread is coming to remember the Lord Jesus in communion, sometimes called the breaking of bread, the Lord's Supper.

And it appears fairly clear that the early church were in the habit of doing that every Sunday. They would meet together at the church. They would have a meal. But a key purpose of that was to break bread, to remember the Lord Jesus together.

[23 : 18] And in this church, we have a service at 10 o'clock on a Sunday morning when we do that and seek not to have a meal, but to remember the Lord Jesus and to think about him. We also take communion very regularly at our other services.

We'll have the opportunity later on this morning. But breaking bread, remembering the Lord Jesus, a key part of church life. The other key thing which very much comes out in this passage is that it is very important that we base our services around the Word of God.

Here, Paul is able to convey to people lots of things. Remember, he's just written the book of Romans, and he's able to speak at great length to the church in Troas.

Very important that when we come together, it is with the Word of God at the centre of our service. And I think that is true of the services of this church. We are basing everything we say, everything we believe, on the Bible, and it is core to our lives.

We don't tend to go on for hours and hours. You'll probably be quite thankful for that. But we do base our services around God's Word. We give priority to the breaking of bread.

[24 : 32] We also give priority to God's Word. In chapter 2 of Acts, it also mentions prayer and the fellowships that we have together. These obviously are very important, I think, taken for granted here.

But what about the miracle? Let's just spend the last few minutes thinking together about this tremendous event that happened in Troas. I've called it the miracle of Troas.

I put that picture up because I think most likely we're talking here about a fairly young teenager. Someone who's maybe something between 12 and 14. That is what the original word in the Greek implies.

So we're not talking about an adult. We're talking about a boy. And this boy, Eutychus. Eutychus means lucky. May have seemed lucky partway through this incident here.

But the name Eutychus means lucky. And he had come. And when he came, he found there was a very long sermon. Now, I don't think we're supposed to think that Paul just spoke and spoke and spoke and went on.

[25 : 35] The sense here is that there was a bit more of a dialogue. And maybe the Christians were asking Paul questions. And then Paul would answer as he did at some length. And the whole thing stretched out.

So there was a long sermon. And then there is a tragic accident. This young man, Eutychus, may well have done a day's work before he came. It was late in the evening.

It was hot and smoky in the room. And Paul maybe had lost his interest at some point. And he falls out of the window. Obviously, he's not the first or last person to fall asleep while someone's preaching.

I had a bit of a reputation when I was a boy that I tended to nod off a bit during long sermons. That was OK in a way. But then I often started to snore and yawn. And that got a bit embarrassing for my parents.

Less excuse, and Eutychus did. But it's not an uncommon thing to happen. What is uncommon, obviously, is the tragic event. He was sitting in the window. And he fell out.

[26 : 37] And he landed on the ground from three stories up. Now, again, you might think there's some ambiguity in the passage. Was he really dead or not? I think we can take it he was dead.

What's the first thing that happens when someone is in an accident? The call goes out, is there a doctor in the house? Oh, yes, there's a doctor. Luke is here. And Luke runs down and examines the young man.

It isn't in the past. I'm speculating. But I think it probably will be right. Luke examines the young man and concludes that, unfortunately, sadly, he's died in the accident. So we have here a tragedy.

Someone who's come along to hear Paul, to meet with Christians, and he's ended up falling out of the window onto the ground. But then there's a dramatic revival.

And I say revival. It is a bringing back to life. There are, I think, eight miracles in the Bible where people are brought back to life from being dead.

[27 : 35] Two in the lives of Elijah and Elisha, one each, which the children are looking at at the moment in their kids' church series. Four in the life of the Lord Jesus, including his own resurrection.

I'm not counting here those who came from the grave after his death. We could add that in, I guess. And then there are two in the book of Acts, one by Peter Dorcas, and then this one by Paul raising Eutychus.

So it's not a common event in the Bible. It is something pretty spectacular. The other thing that's probably worth noting here is that Paul probably deliberately echoes what Elijah and Elisha had done when they similarly raised young men who had died.

He stretched himself on the arm, stretches his arm around him, and brings him back to life. It is a wonderful miracle. Someone who has died, someone who it appears there is no hope for, Paul restores him to life, and he is able to resume his normal life.

And what does that mean? It means that Paul leaves the church a lot stronger than it otherwise might have been. It says that people were greatly comforted, or as I said, the room meaning is greatly encouraged.

[28 : 52] When I was preparing for today, I looked at quite a number of sermons on this passage to try and find what is the lesson from it. And most of them really struggled with it. There were some who were saying the lesson is don't fall asleep in church or something bad might happen to you.

I'm not sure that is really the lesson here. There are others who had lessons that said there are churches which are sleeping, that have lost a concentration. If they're not careful, they'll die.

But the good news is they can be revived. Well, I think that is again stretching what Luke is intending us to understand here. I think he wants us to get the marvel of the situation of the raising of Eutychus, and what a wonderful thing that was.

But I think he also wants us to get what it meant for the church. If Paul hadn't raised Eutychus back to life, what would people have remembered about that evening?

Well, it was evening Paul was with us, but it wasn't as sad it was the evening when Eutychus died. Now they could look back and say, that was evening when Paul was with us. Wasn't it wonderful the way he taught us?

[29 : 59] And wasn't it tremendous that Eutychus was brought back to life as well, and is still with us, presumably in the church? He left the church in a much stronger position, not just because of his teaching, but also because of that tremendous miracle.

He helped in a practical way, and he encouraged the Christians in their faith. Okay, it's been a bit of a bitty sermon, so let me just try and bring it together as we close.

I want to do that with this quotation. This chap is called Arthur Penrill and Stanley. He was Dean of Westminster Abbey way back in the 19th century. This is a great quote.

The true call of a Christian is not to do extraordinary things, raising people back to life, but to do ordinary things in an extraordinary way.

We've largely this morning been talking about ordinary things, the bread and butter of Christian life, sharing the gospel, encouraging other Christians, showing practical love to people, meeting together as a church.

[31 : 09] These are ordinary things that we should all be doing. But the question is, how do we do them? Do we do it just as a matter of routine?

We come to church on Sunday, we meet some people, we go home. Maybe if I get the chance, I might have a word with one of my friends about the gospel, I might not. Or do we do ordinary things in extraordinary ways?

Do we go above and beyond what others might expect in the way we serve the Lord, in the way that we live as Christians? I think that's what Dean Stanley is asking here.

Do we share the gospel with enthusiasm, taking every opportunity we can to explain the love of the Lord Jesus to those who desperately need to know him?

Do we go out of our way to encourage and to strengthen others in the church? Do we spend sacrificial time in helping others, in showing Christ's love in practical ways?

[32 : 14] And when we come together as a church, is it just all a bit ordinary, or is it really special, and people go, we really encourage because they've met us at the church?

I think these are the kind of challenges you'd be good to take away. And let me end with an example. Doesn't sound very ordinary at first sight, but I think it is.

Her Majesty the Queen, we're celebrating her Jubilee this weekend. Yes, she lives in great privilege and great wealth, but the Queen does, for her, some very ordinary things.

She goes out and meets people and greets them constantly, not so much now, but in the past, constantly going and talking with people and making them feel good. She meets with prime ministers to discuss a phase of state.

She does lots of things which are actually pretty routine and which she might get fed up with. But she does them in an extraordinary way. 70 years almost unblemished in the example she sets.

[33 : 17] And what is the motivation of our Queen? It is that she is a Christian. Every opportunity she gets to speak, she tends to refer to her Christian faith.

Listen to any Christmas broadcast from recent years and the Queen will talk about her Christian faith. I think in some ways she's the most effective evangelist we've got in this country.

And yes, she does. She's in an extraordinary situation, but she does ordinary things, the basic things of her role in extraordinary ways that glorify God and that really help others.

And we take an example of people like that, and there are lots of others I could have quoted. Unless when we are Christians, when we serve the Lord Jesus, let's make a real effort to do it to the best of our abilities, to be excellent in the way that we do things, that other people may be encouraged, that others may be brought to know him, that we may really glorify God in what we do.

Let's not be lethargic in our Christian lives. Let's share the gospel enthusiastically, encourage Christians joyfully, share Christ's love practically with others.

[34 : 28] And when we meet together as church, let's make it really special. Now, I mean, we're going to share communion together, but let me just pray before we move on. Father, we thank you for your word to us this morning.

We thank you for the Apostle Paul and for the way he so faithfully served you as he went around these different churches, preaching the gospel and encouraging the Christians and showing practical love to them.

Help us to be those who do ordinary things of the Christian life, the things that we should be doing, but do them in extraordinary ways that really glorify you and help others.

We thank you for your presence this morning. We pray you'll be with us now as those of us in the church move on to take communion together. We give thanks in Jesus' name. Amen. Before we enter into a time of communion, we're just going to sing again.