

God's Mission

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[0 : 0 0] Well, good morning everyone. Are we well? Excellent. Here we are, finishing Luke's Gospel this morning. Cannot wait to see what God has to teach us if we finish this Gospel together.

So why don't you turn to Luke chapter 24 and those verses that Alice just read for us a moment ago. And just before we get stuck in, why don't we just still our hearts and let's commit this time that we have studying God's precious Word to Him.

Why don't we pray? Heavenly Father, we want to take time and still ourselves now and just take stock of the fact that there is simply none like you.

That you have no equal. Father, that you are the unparalleled one. And we ask this morning, Father, that you would help us by your Spirit grasp something more of your incomparable greatness.

Father, would you blow our minds this morning as we turn to your Word? We pray through Jesus' precious name. Amen. So to begin, I thought we'd play a little game called Guess the Flag.

[1 : 0 6] In fact, there's only one flag, so it's not much of a game. What's the flag? India. Put your hands up. Have you ever been to India? India. Wow, we're a well-traveled congregation. Excellent.

How did we get to India? He says there's number one rule of public speaking. You've got to be pretty confident what the answer is coming back. So how did you get to India? Anybody? In a plane. Yeah? In a plane.

Let me tell you the story of a man who travelled to India from England in 1871 and he took the boat. Okay? This is what he writes in his diary.

The seasickness and the smell of the ship made me feel very miserable. Added to that the prospect of leaving all the comforts and communion of the saints in England to go forth to an unknown land to endure such illness and misery with ungodly men for so many months weighed heavy on my spirits.

My heart was almost ready to break. So those are the words of a man called Henry Martin. Henry Martin brought up in a well-to-do family, sent to one of the finest grammar schools that England has to offer.

[2 : 2 2] However, so well does he do at school that at the age of 16, he's offered a place at Cambridge to study maths. And so well did he do at Cambridge while he studied maths that he graduated top of his year with the highest honours.

So here's a guy in his early 20s and the world is at his feet. He can do anything he wants. The world is at his feet. But while he was at university, Henry Martin became a Christian.

And he set his heart on being a missionary because in his heart was a fire for the people of India. So he sets about dedicating himself to the task of translating the New Testament into Arabic, into Persian and into Hindustani, the three major languages of the Muslim world of India that he was about to step into.

He embraces a life of no thrills, opposition, rejection, sickness, and at times loneliness. Now you can imagine that is miles away from the life he has left behind in England.

Now here's the question I hope you're asking, I think you're asking at this point. It's the question that's been on my mind ever since I read about this man, Henry Martin, this week. Why would anyone do that? Yeah?

[3 : 43] What would possess a person to give it all up and travel to a foreign land not knowing what's going to happen to him? What possesses a person to do that? Especially Henry Martin, he dies at the age of 31.

Presumably that's the question that Theophilus, remember the man that Luke is writing for, he is asking himself as he looks out and he observes the early church in action. So he looks out and he sees men and women who have been with Jesus living radically different lives, giving themselves for the cause of telling others about Jesus and very much counting the cost for doing so.

Why would anyone want to do that? To be honest, I say it's the question that as I see some of you guys in action, that I ask myself. So as I see teens, as I hear about teens standing tall for Jesus at school, of students saying no to temptation and yes to sexual purity, speaking for Jesus at great cost to their reputation and popularity, of workers giving up some of their income, giving up some of that precious free time to come and serve the church, of people approaching retirement age and while the rest of the watching world thinks holiday home south of France, kick it back, it's my time, you think, how can I best serve God with this spare time that I have in this new season of my life?

Why would anybody want to do that? Well, these verses in Luke give us the answer. People do it because they have bought into God's mission.

They bought into God's mission. The three words at verse 47, to all nations. To all nations.

[5 : 40] That God through his people is intent on getting the whole gospel to the whole world. The people in our country, the people in our city, the people on our streets, the people in our stairwells, the people in our families, the people in our workplaces, the people in our social circles.

God's heart, his desire, is that they would repent of their sin through Jesus come to know him. That's his heart. So here's the question I want to ask us as a church this morning, all of us here together as one body.

It's have we synced ourselves with God's mission? Are we synced? It's a question this morning that we want to think about as we travel through these verses. Perhaps you're sitting there and you're thinking to yourself, why should I sync myself with God's mission?

Why should I do that? Why should I give up things, die to myself and live for Jesus? Why should I do that? Well, as we zoom in on these first disciples, and as Luke shows us in these verses, the truths, the convictions that have captured their hearts, let's let Luke give us three reasons why we should buy into God's mission.

Three reasons. Are you ready for these? Something, anything. Give me something. Yeah? Ready for these? Here's reason number one, verses 36 to 43 if you've got it there. The son is living.

[7 : 10] The son is living. We pick it up at verse 36. Disciples, what are they doing? They're talking. Talking. What are they talking about?

The news of verse 34. That it's true. Jesus is risen. And all of a sudden, in an instant, Jesus is standing with them.

How do they feel? Look at some of the adjectives that Luke uses here. How are they using? How are they feeling? Frightened. How are they feeling? Startled. What do they think they've seen?

A ghost, a spirit. This is what they think they've seen. Are they hallucinating? Has the hysteria of the moment, has it taken over their senses? But they've no need to panic.

Jesus speaks. And here's what Luke wants us to see about Jesus. That he is no ghost. They have not clasped eyes on Casper.

[8 : 10] This is no spirit that they're seeing. This is the physically risen Jesus. And I love here how Luke, remember the good doctor? He slips into doctor mode. Follow with me.

Look how he appeals to the senses here. As he shows us how Jesus spoke to the disciples. To the sight. Look at the words. Look. See.

He showed them. They watched him eat. To the hearing. He said. They clearly heard. To the touch.

Touch my hands and my feet. They gave him. To the smell. Broiled fish. Now that sounds like something Gollum out of Lord of the Rings would eat, doesn't it? But, it is actually cooked and seasoned fish.

Sight. Hearing. Touch. Smell. The senses confirm what they thought was true. Now what is it we always say when something seems too good to be true?

[9 : 10] What's that phrase? Pinch me. Pinch me. Because we want our senses to tell us that what we think is happening is really happening.

It pains me to say if you're a Liverpool or Manchester United fan you've probably uttered those words this week. And if you're a Manchester City fan you've probably uttered them as well but for very different reasons.

Pinch me. Am I making this up? Is it really happening? That's what Luke is doing here. The disciples weren't dreaming. This is no old wife's tale.

This is no Chinese whisper that's gone out of hand. Jesus is physically risen. And that really matters. I remember a friend once asking me is there anything that would cause you to stop being a Christian?

That's a great question. Think about it for a minute. Is there anything that would happen that would stop you being a Christian? Because if it was decisively proven to me that Jesus hadn't risen from the dead if somebody could positively identify his bones in a grave in the Middle East somewhere friends I would call this a day.

[10 : 29] I would call it a day. Because Paul would say doesn't he if he is not risen then we are to be pitied amongst higher than all men. Because if Jesus said he would physically rise from the dead and he didn't then he's not even worth following on Twitter let alone with my life.

Some of you may remember the Watergate scandal that happened in America during the 1970s when Richard Nixon was president. Well one of the men at the heart of it was called Charles Coulson.

He was a member of the president's cabinet. And amazingly it's amazing how God works isn't it? That in the midst of this scandal Charles Coulson became a Christian. And here's why he became a Christian.

He said this I know the resurrection to be a fact and Watergate proved it to me because twelve men testified that they had seen Jesus raised from the dead and they proclaimed that message for forty years.

Never once did they deny it. Everyone was beaten tortured stoned and put in prison they would not have endured that if it were not true. Watergate embroiled twelve of the most powerful men in the world and they couldn't keep alive for three weeks.

[11 : 51] You're telling me twelve apostles could keep alive for forty years? Absolutely impossible. Now what is Charles Coulson saying there?

He's saying that you would not die for a lie. Friends the Christian faith is not built on a foundation of feelings.

The Christian faith is built on a foundation of facts. That Jesus is risen. That he physically rose from the grave.

The son is living. Now maybe you're here and you wouldn't call yourself a Christian. I just say love that you're here. But let me challenge you as you hear God's appeal through his word this morning is it time that you've faced up to the facts?

Because in typical doctor style as Luke presents this to us the resurrection is good news and it's bad news. It's good news because for those who trust in Jesus just as death wasn't the end for him death won't be the end for us.

[12 : 59] It's glorious news. But here's the bad news. Jesus will return to judge the world. God has installed him and exalted him as heaven's king and he will judge it according to how people of the world have responded to him.

So let me ask you how do you respond to the facts of the risen Jesus this morning? Incredible to see as well that Jesus doesn't just want them to know the fact he wants them to know what the fact means.

Now look there what is the first word that he says to the disciples? Peace. To a Jew it's this idea of shalom wholeness harmony in other words things are back to the way that they were meant to be.

Is it not interesting that's the first word that Jesus wants to bring to his disciples peace? The sin barrier that separated them from God Jesus smashed it.

The wrath of God that was on them because of their sin Jesus dealt with it. The sting of death that was ahead of them Jesus conquered it. Jesus has made a way for peace to be true for the disciples for things to go back to the way that they were always meant to be with us living in relationship with the God who made us.

[14 : 31] Do you know that peace? the son is living says Luke. Have we synced our lives friends with God's mission?

Reason number two verses 44 to 49 the son is living second reason the spirit is helping verse 44 Jesus takes his disciples on the shortest but the most mind blowing Bible study ever.

Two aspects to this Bible study firstly he takes them back. What does he say? This is what I told you would happen. And you can give him that because we've seen it repeatedly through this gospel that Jesus has said time and time again that this would happen that he would be handed over that he would die that he would rise.

But you see what's happened over the past few days is much bigger than that. The roots of this plan don't just extend to the last three years actually the plot line of God's redemptive story is a plan that was conceived in eternity past.

The plan God's plan and this is awesome that all nations on the earth would be blessed. And how would God accomplish that?

[15 : 45] Well see Jesus say that everything in the Old Testament the law of Moses the prophets the Psalms they were all speaking about who? Him.

They were all speaking about and pointing to Christ. Now our little girl Chloe's favourite film in the moment is Paddington 2. Anyone seen Paddington 2?

No? A few hands. Gordon has seen it. Gordon has seen it. A few hands here. Now I'm just glad that Frozen seems to have been frozen for the time being but she's really into Paddington 2. watched it so many times.

Now it's a kid's film so the plot line is not massively complicated but it's one of those ones that the first time you watch it and you see how it ends you're left thinking to yourself oh that's why and that's how the bad guy managed to do it.

Every time I've subsequently rewatched it with her because I know the ending part of the that's why that connection mattered that's why that line mattered that's why that friend speaking to that friend mattered even more the third time even more the fourth time and believe you me even more the tenth time that happened it's like that with the Bible because I know how it ends as it were because I know God's good promises find their fulfillment in Jesus see when I go back and read my Old Testament I see the clues that were there all along that's why that mattered I get it now that Jesus is the promised serpent crusher of Genesis 3 I get it I'd never seen it before I see now that Jesus is the suffering servant that Isaiah was speaking about in Isaiah 53 that's right Jesus is God's exalted and installed king that

[17 : 40] David speaks about in Psalm 2 I'd never seen that before we've got a children's bible by Sally Lloyd Jones called the Jesus storybook bible that we read sometimes with the girls the strap line that's on that front cover every story whispers his name every story whispers his name it's exactly what Jesus is saying and he opens their minds to understand it they get it they see it they love it that Jesus was no random carpenter who kicked up in the Middle East and did some neat tricks taught some moral lessons he is God's Messiah he is God's son he is the one in whom God's plan to unite all things in heaven and earth centres Jesus takes them back it was all pointed to me it was all pointed to this moment and Jesus takes them forward and gives them a big vision for a big mission that

God beginning with them as they witness to the risen Jesus is going to declare his glory to all the nations now remember that there's only something like 120 of them at this point probably something like the size of this room here this morning and they have got to go to the world 120 of them have got to go to the nations talk about feeling out your depth talk about feeling outnumbered and talk about feeling unqualified fishermen tax collectors I mean case in point Peter he's just denied Jesus three times if I were to pick my dream team of disciples to go on this mission he would not even make the bench but Jesus says this gospel the news about me that I am risen what the father has done is going to all nations starting with you as you witness for me through these ordinary people

God is going to accomplish extraordinary things and I'll be honest and say that massively comforts me because there are very rarely moments that go by that I do not feel ordinary and God is going to accomplish extraordinary things I feel very ordinary I feel very unqualified but God uses unqualified unspectacular people to accomplish extraordinary things but how does he do that verse 49 because he will provide the power God will give his people his promised spirit who will empower them for this mission of making Jesus known throughout the whole world and it's incredible because it's with the spirit's power that as we turn to Luke sequel as we turn to the book of Acts we see

Peter filled with the spirit and he's a different man he is a different man whereas before he didn't want anyone to know that he was associated with Jesus now he wants the world to know whereas before he was scared of a little servant girl now he's standing in front of councils tons of people and he's telling them about Jesus there is no explanation for that other than the spirit remember when I was young and people had this song search for the hero inside themselves Peter has not done that because there was no hero inside Peter and there's no hero inside me there is no explanation for this other than God's spirit God's spirit the third person of the Godhead sent to live in the hearts of every single one of God's people with the job of helping us glorify Jesus putting him in the spotlight and living lives that display and proclaim his greatness to the watching world as through his spirit God transforms his people

God equips his people God empowers his people to carry out his mission of making his name known to the nations God you know Alex and I went out for dinner last night and just before we were ready to go we had our coach the waitress turns around to us and says that classic line any other plans for the weekend and I'm thinking to myself in the back of my head it's 10 o'clock and it's late it's 10 o'clock we've got a babysitter at home we need to get back for maybe I could just dodge this one but then I remembered what I've been studying all week that God has given me his spirit to carry out his mission and the truth is that this girl needs to know I didn't get out a chart I didn't get the iPhone out and show her two ways to live I didn't do anything like that I just probably said something like we'll be at church tomorrow I can't wait but it was this truth that made a difference to me that the spirit is helping the spirit is living inside of me and it's for proclamation friends have we synced our lives with God's mission the son is living the spirit is helping finally reason number three verses 50 to 53 the father is moving verse 50

[23 : 09] Jesus leads them out to the vicinity of Bethany while he was blessing them he leaves them he ascends into heaven where he takes his place in God's throne room as heaven's victorious king he is ascended he is risen he is reigning he is ruling and notice the two reactions of the disciples they return to Jerusalem just as Jesus told them to do you see even at this early stage the infancy stage here these followers of Jesus are marked by a radical obedience to his words and they are also marked by a radical worship of his name do you see how Luke gives us those three parallel words that capture the mood of the hearts and minds of the disciples they worshipped with great joy continually praising God they worshipped with great joy continually praising God this is a transformed people

I love it as you turn to Acts chapter 4 what the rulers the elders and the scribes as they look at Peter and John in action as they watch them witness for Jesus what is it they say about them that they were uneducated common men they were country bumpkins as far as the religious leaders were concerned but what else did they say what else did they notice that these men had been with Jesus so there was something of the Jesus aroma that was carried by the disciples as they went they had been with Jesus it's funny there was a survey carried out in 2012 by Marie Curie Cancer Care and they asked living celebrities what it is that they would like written about them on their gravestone here's my favourite Louis Theroux he said so now do you finally believe that I've got man flu like that but here's my question for you what is it that you would like written about you in your gravestone

I was thinking on it this week what would people say about me minister husband father Airdrie fan some of them more important than others but probably something like that but here's the thing I really hope people write at the end of my life when it's all said and done Graham Shanks we saw that he had been with Jesus we saw that he had been with Jesus it's what they say of the early disciples is it not these disciples who were marked by radical obedience and who were marked by radical worship it was Winston Churchill who famously said now this is not the end it is not even the beginning of the end but it is perhaps the end of the beginning I think that captures well the mood at the end of Luke's gospel do you notice incidentally that we're back at the temple where we started at chapter 1 and you have to say that there's such a sense of anticipation as we finish this gospel there's such a sense of expectation at verse 53 that God is moving that God is fulfilling his desire to see the nations come to worship him this is God's plan the anticipation do you feel it that this is going forward this is what's going to happen these 120 people taking on the world and it is his mission he is the one who raised Jesus from the dead he is the one who sent his spirit to live inside the hearts of his people he is the one who is longing for his name to be glorified the world over as God transforms men and women from being his enemies into being his worshippers this is God's mission and let's be quite honest he does not need me for that he does not need you for that but is it not mind blowing that God in his grace as he transforms us more into the image of Christ that he would use us to glorify his name throughout the world somebody once asked Henry

Martin why he did what he did why would anything do something like that why would somebody leave behind the comforts of England those green green pastures and why would they sail for India for a life of hardship here's what he said the spirit of Christ is the spirit of missions the nearer we get to him the more intensely missionary we become I see no business in life but the work of Christ the missionary heart of Henry Martin and ask those at the beginning of those who had been to India to raise their hands let's slightly change the angle as we finish put your hands up if you're from Europe a few of us here this morning put your hands up if you're from Africa you look around here we're in church it's okay put your hands up if you're from North

America okay put your hands up if you're from South America I didn't see any polar bears coming in this morning so I was going to go Antarctica as well but I think not put your hands up lastly if you're from Asia you see it what God is doing everything so we didn't do we did not do Australasia anybody here from Australia New Zealand anywhere like that okay we didn't quite get the full suite but you see what God is doing do you see what God has done this tiny little microcosm of people in Edinburgh who have gathered here this morning here we are representing the world do you see how God is committed to his plan of the whole gospel going to the whole world do you see how God is committed to his plan of blessing the nations through his people how incredible is that that what started here with 120 people in a city in the Middle East and here is God today moving the world over through his gospel as he gathers worshippers around the globe for himself this is not incredible this is where we are as we end Luke's gospel and this is what we see as we come to the words of Revelation chapter 7

[29 : 41] John sees this great vision of a great multitude of worshippers that through Jesus God has won for himself and here's what he sees after this I looked and there before me was a great multitude that nobody could count from every nation every tribe every people and language standing before the throne and before the Lamb they were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands and they cried out in a loud voice salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne and to the Lamb here is God's mission convictions behind it the Son is living the Spirit is helping and the Father is moving friends as we close right here let me ask us as a church have we synced ourselves have we bought into God's mission let's pray together and maybe just in the silence now before we close with our final hymn now is the time to maybe recommit yourself to God's mission

Father in heaven hallowed be your name thank you for the time that we've been able to spend in Luke's gospel over this last while just reading for ourselves about the incomparable greatness of your son Jesus would you help us this morning knowing that you have not left us on our own to figure this out that you've given us your spirit would you help us this morning to sink our lives with your mission and with your cause the cause that you have of winning men and women boys and girls around this planet around this globe to yourself creating this people who worship you forever father you are great and we pray that you'll be with us this week because we ask in

Jesus's precious name amen