The Mission of the Christ

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[0:00] A few years ago, David Brooks, a New York Times columnist, wrote an article entitled It's Not About You.

And in it, he laments the fact that as a nation, we mislead young people toward radical individualism. And he wrote this. He says, we tell them, follow your passion, chart your own course, march to the beat of your own drummer, follow your dreams, and find yourself.
This is the litany of expressive individualism, which is still the dominant note in American culture. But, he continues, this talk is of no help to the central business of adulthood, finding serious things to tie yourself down to.
The successful young adult is beginning to make sacred commitments to a spouse, a community, and calling, yet mostly hears about freedom and autonomy. Today's young adults are also told to find their passion and then pursue their dreams.
The implication is that they should find themselves first and then go off and live their quest. But, of course, very few people at age 22 or 24 can take an inward journey and come out having discovered a developed self.
[1:17] Most successful young people don't look inside and then plan a life. They look outside and find a problem which summons their life.

The purpose in life is not to find yourself. It's to lose yourself, he writes. In other words, the purpose of life is not to identify some grand, unfulfilled desire and dream within ourselves and then to dedicate our lives, the rest of our lives, to pursuing it.
Rather, it's the purpose of our lives to find something greater than ourselves, external to ourselves, and then to forget about ourselves and lose ourselves in it. If our goal is self-fulfillment, self-realization, self-actualization, then ultimately we will have unfulfilling relationships, unfulfilling careers, and we'll be bitterly disappointed at our old age and wonder what went wrong.
This is true because it's essentially what Jesus said in Mark 8, verses 34 to 37. If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.
For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospels will save it. The truth is that people who live meaningful lives, fulfilling lives, don't look within themselves in the plan of life.
[2:41] Rather, they look outside and find a problem and then a cause greater than themselves and then they are summoned by it. And in this passage, John 4, 27 to 42, we see the greatest summons that comes upon man and woman, the greatest calling that anyone can receive in their life, and that is to play a part in advancing the mission of Christ to save the world.

Literally, to save the world. I mean, that's what we joke about, right? This is why I'm going to go and save the world, find this career. But that's what this passage calls us to. It first teaches us about the purpose of the mission, and then secondly, about the priority of the mission.
And then third, about the partnership in the mission. So the purpose, the priority, and the partnership. And in order to discern the purpose of this mission, we need to go back to the passage we talked about this past week and connect it back.
Because Jesus had offered this Samaritan woman living water, which is the Spirit of God who imparts eternal life to all who have communion with Him, all who come to Him and trust in Him. And He said that the way to receive this living water is through Jesus.
He is the Christ, the Messiah that was to come. And so as He's talking to this Samaritan woman about these things, His disciples finally come back from their trip into the sea to buy food. And then they say to Him, verse 27, So their surprise reflects the prejudice of their day because some Jews at this time believed and taught that it was a waste of time for a Jewish rabbi to talk to a woman,

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even their own wives.
[4:20] In fact, they said that at best it was the waste of time, and at worst it's a diversion from studying the Torah, the law of God, that could lead to hell. That's what some of these Jews taught. And so not only does Jesus blatantly disregard the misogyny of His day, He transcends the religious, political, and ethnic hostilities between Jews and Samaritans by approaching and speaking to this Samaritan woman.

And for Jesus, this was not a diversion. It was not a waste of time. It was not a distraction because this was a part of His mission. Because He's not just the Messiah of the Jews.
It tells us in verse 42, He's the Savior of the world. He didn't come to save a pocket of the world. He's claiming to save the world, to reach the nations, all races, ethnic groups.
18th century theologian Jonathan Edwards writes in this book, The Nature of True Virtues, that private affection, if not subordinate to general affection, is not only liable to issue and enmity to being in general, but has a tendency to it.
What He's saying is that if our private affections, our smaller affections, are not subordinate to a general affection, then that will tend toward enmity toward others and cause divisions.
[5:35] To illustrate, if our highest allegiance in our lives, in our world, is to ourselves, then naturally we're not going to look out for the interests of others because we're fending for ourselves our own interests.

If our highest interest is for our family, then naturally we will neglect the needs of other families because we're trying to care for our own families.
If our highest allegiance is to our class, maybe a socioeconomic class, or political party, race, nation, or gender, then naturally we will become classicists, chauvinists, racists, jingoists, sexists.
It's only when God is our highest good and His mission to save the whole world is our highest pursuit, then that's when we become, our hearts are drawn, not just to a small pocket of the world, our own families, gender, race, and class, but to the whole world in general.
And surely after the polarizing presidential election this week, some of you are elated, while others of you are downright depressed. And now I will never endorse a political party or a candidate from the pulpit because this is a pulpit.
[6:52] It's not a podium for advancing the human agenda and talking about the kingdom of men. This is a pulpit for advancing the kingdom of God and proclaiming the word of God. But I will say this much.

It's that without minimizing your emotions and what you're feeling, how we feel today should be governed more by what Christ has done for us. And we should be more absorbed by this mission that Christ calls all believers to than by anything that's going on around us.
Our desire to look out for our own interests, our families, our socioeconomic class, even our own nation, all of it should be subsumed by, subordinated to, the mission of God because that's where our primary allegiance should lie.
And that's what Christ does in this passage. Verse 40, when the Samaritans ask Jesus to stay with them, he does, which would have been shocking and difficult to do at the time because of the hostilities between Jews and Samaritans.
It would have been not unlike, you know, defying segregation laws in the 1950s in the U.S. or defying apartheid in South Africa in the 1980s.
[8:09] Yet Jesus does that. He stays with the Samaritans, eats with them, lives among them, and teaches them. So that's the purpose of this mission is to save the world by offering Christ to the world.

That's the mission that Christ calls us to. That's the purpose of the mission. It's grand. It's universal. It encompasses the entire world. And then we learn about the priority of this mission in Jesus' ensuing dialogue with his disciples.
After returning from their trip into the city of Samaria to buy food, the disciples urged Jesus to eat in verse 31. And we know from last week's passage that Jesus was thirsty. He asked the woman for a drink.
And probably he's hungry too because he had been on a long journey going through Samaria. And so he's, but even though he's hungry and thirsty probably at this time, he doesn't eat.
He takes advantage instead of this circumstance, this opportunity to teach his disciples about his priorities. So he responds in verse 32. I have food to eat that you do not know about.

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[9:14] Just before this interaction, the Samaritan woman had been confused by Jesus' mention of living water and because Jesus was talking about spiritual water, right? The living water, the spirit of God.

And this time, Jesus' disciples are confused by Jesus' mention of food. And so they ask among themselves, has anyone brought him something to eat? And Jesus, hearing this, explains to them in verse 34.
My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to accomplish his work. This is a reference to Deuteronomy 8, verse 3, where Moses tells the Israelites that God humbled them and fed them with manna from heaven, which they did not know.
And then he says this, that he might make you know that man does not live by bread alone, but man lives by every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord. What Moses meant by this in telling the Israelites this is that at an even more fundamental level than bread, than our daily physical sustenance, it is God who ultimately sustains us.
His word, his sustaining grace, his common grace, that God is the one that sustains us at an even more fundamental level than food. And Jesus is now taking this teaching, appropriating this, to teach them that for him, doing the Father's will, accomplishing the mission that he was sent out to accomplish, that provides for him greater satisfaction and sustenance than food, than eating.
[10:42] Jesus is so absorbed by his mission to the Samaritans at this point, so engaged, probably thinking back to the conversation he had with the Samaritan woman, that thought, even though he is thirsty and hungry, the thought of food is far from him.

So just as the Samaritan woman left her water jar to tell the townspeople about the living water, Jesus now leaves food aside because of his pressing concern for the Samaritans.
And we too must not lose sight of this purpose, the priority of this mission because we're simply too busy living, right? Too busy eating and drinking and other chores of the day.
And this is, even though we might ask at this point, Jesus, come on, this is just food. It's not like they were telling you to do something that's a luxury. They're telling you to eat.
You need to eat to work and to live. But this, he's making an important point. It's an important danger. And John Piper talks about this in his book, Hunger for God. He writes this, The greatest enemy of hunger for God is not poison, but apple pie.
[11:52] It is not the banquet of the wicked that dulls our appetite for heaven, but endless nibbling at the table of the world. The greatest adversary of love of God is not his enemies, but his gifts.

And the most deadly appetites are not for the poison of evil, but for the simple pleasures of earth. For when these replace an appetite for God himself, the idolatry is scarcely recognizable and almost incurable.
That's why we as Christians practice the spiritual discipline of fasting, because we want to teach and train not just our minds, but our guts, so that we know not just intellectually, but viscerally, that God is more fundamental to us, more important to us than anything in the world, even food.
The things that draw us away from God and distract us from God's mission are often not wicked sins, but seemingly innocent pleasures and preoccupations. What's on the front page of the newspaper today?
What the polls are saying today? Scrolling through our Facebook news feed or Twitter, surfing channels, flipping from one channel to another, wondering what's going on on Instagram today?
[13:13] These little things, these are not bad, sinful things in and of themselves. But yet, when they distract us from the mission of God, they can become sinful disobedience when they are unduly prioritized over and above our call to seek and save the lost as part of Christ's mission.

And so by foregoing even the most basic human need of food, Jesus teaches us the utmost priority of this mission. And the Gospels provide no record of Jesus even batting an eye at the social, political, military upheavals of his day.
He doesn't. There's no record of that. But he wearied himself down to the bone. He forsook food and drink to save the Samaritan woman's soul. That's how he pursued us.
That's how he lived every ounce. He had used every ounce of his energy. That's how he lived every moment of his life. He was motivated by consuming zeal for God's glory in the world and he had no higher delight, no greater joy than to offer eternal life to people that he came into contact with.
God, I pray that he forgives us for our lack of zeal, for his glory and the lack of love for souls that we see in our lives. Do we also prioritize Christ's mission to save the world so that we can scarcely go

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a day without proclaiming his gospel?
[14:47] Do we still prioritize Christ's mission to save the world that we consider it most basic to us, to our survival, even more so than even to eat? Are we so captivated and engrossed in Christ and his mission that everything else seems of secondary importance to us?

And I hope you're not thinking at this point, well, that's your job, pastor. That's not my job.
I have work to do because brothers and sisters, proclaiming the gospel, sharing Christ with the world is not my job. It's our job. It's the church's job. There's an important difference between occupation and vocation.
And occupation is what we do to make a living. Whether that's being a teacher, a secretary, a mother, a babysitter, sales rep, an analyst, a professor, an artist.
And the Bible, as much as we like to look around for, it doesn't give us very specific directions about what he wants us to do in terms of our occupation. A vocation is our calling.
[16:00] It's our calling to Christ and to his mission that's valid, that applies to all of us, every Christian. And the Bible's filled from cover to cover with instructions, injunctions, exhortations about this vocation.

And everything we do, including our occupation, is encompassed by and subsumed by this holy vocation. So then, we can't say we're not called to evangelism or mission.
Every Christian is called to that. This is what William Booth, who's the founder of the Salvation Army, you guys know about the Salvation Army, he had this to say when someone replied to him that he's not called to evangelism.
He said, not called, did you say? Not heard the call, I think you should say. Put your ear down to the Bible and hear him bid you go and pull sinners out of the fire of sin.
Put your ear down to the burdened, agonized heart of humanity and listened to its pitiful wail for help. Go stand by the gates of hell and hear the damned entreat you to go to their father's house and bid their brothers and sisters and servants and masters not to come there.
[17:11] And then look Christ in the face, whose mercy you have professed to obey and tell him whether you will join heart and soul and body and circumstances in the march to publish his mercy to the world.

When we know the source of living water, when we know the source of eternal life, what does it say about us that we shy away from telling people about Jesus because we fear inconveniencing them or because we're embarrassed?
How selfish and unloving is that? Indeed, how hateful is that to withhold living water, eternal life from people who are perishing without it? I'm not saying that all of you should leave your current jobs and become traveling evangelists, right?
But all of us, because of your unique place, location, and occupation, you have a unique ability to harness the resources, the relationships, the expertise that you have for the sake of the kingdom of God.
You can reach people that I can never reach because of where you are. Right? And that is our Christian calling to be faithful, to declare and demonstrate the good news of Jesus Christ in all that we do, including in our occupation.
[18:33] And Jesus further elaborates on this priority of the mission by using a farming analogy in verses 35 and 36. He writes, Do you not say there are yet four months then comes the harvest?

Look, I tell you, lift up your eyes and see that the fields are white for harvest. Already, the one who reaps is receiving wages and gathering fruit for eternal life so that sower and reaper may rejoice together.
Jesus here uses another metaphor to refer to a deeper spiritual reality. There was a generally known agricultural saying that there are yet four months then comes the harvest because from the end of the sowing period to the beginning of the harvesting, the reaping period, it was about four months.
So that's what they used to say. Well, we got to wait four months and then there will be a harvest. But in this spiritual harvest, Jesus says, there's no waiting. The fields are already white for harvest. In fact, the one who reaps is receiving wages already and gathering fruit for eternal life. And the sower and the reaper rejoice together. And that's a reference in allusion to Amos 9, chapter 9, verse 13, where the prophet says that a day is coming when the plowman shall overtake the reaper and the treader of grapes him who sows the seed.

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[19:50] So what that means is it's a prediction, it's a prophecy about a time when there was such extraordinary fruitfulness in the land that people will be sowing and reaping at the same time.

People who sow will be overtaken by the reapers, people who reap will be overtaken by the sowers. And Jesus says that time, that end time, is now because he has come. And now is a time when sowing and reaping take place at the same time so that they're able to rejoice together.
This is another reason why Christ's mission must be prioritized because the time for the harvest is not four months from now. It's not two years from now when we are better equipped and prepared. It's not five years from now when your neighbor is more ready to hear the gospel.
It's now. The harvest is now. The time has come and that's another reason to prioritize the mission of Christ. And this agricultural metaphor reveals the third aspect of Christ's mission.
First, the purpose, the priority, and now our partnership in the mission. Jesus continues in verses 37-38. For here the saying holds true, one sows and another reaps.
[20:58] I sent you to reap that for which you did not labor. Others have labored and you have entered into their labor. So we are now in a time when sowing and reaping coincide.

It is still generally true that often we'll reap what others have sown and others will reap what we have sown. And that's what happened when a few weeks ago we celebrated baptisms.
We didn't sow those seeds. Others did. But we got to reap what others have sown. In a similar way we will be sowing many seeds here and others will reap when the harvest.
comes. And even in this story we see this because Jesus sows the gospel with the Samaritans but before him John the Baptist had preached nearby and after Jesus Philip the Evangelist will come later in the book of Acts chapter 8 and he will have a wide harvest a great harvest and many will come to know him through his ministry.
And what that means is that this partnership in the harvest of soul obviates any sense of competition because we recognize that we're all in this together. We partner together. It's not about who reaps or who sows.
[22:11] We rejoice together because now we're in a time when those two things coincide. And it means it should also free us and encourage us to play our part in advancing the mission of Christ to save the world because we don't have the burden of the entire enterprise weighing us down.

It's not up to us ultimately. We partake in the mission of Christ and ultimately God himself does the heavy lifting. And we see this in verse 39.
It says, Many Samaritans from that town believed in him because of the woman's testimony. He told me all that I ever did. Now, I hope you see here that these people are not coming to know Christ because of this Samaritan woman's competence because she is an incredible apologist for the faith.
She was known in the neighborhood for being a promiscuous woman. She was discredited by her neighbors. And she goes and what does she say?
She says, He told me all that I ever did. Come see a man who told me all that I ever did. Verse 29. Can this be the Christ? She's just telling them what she knows. She's just telling him, telling them what Christ did for her, what Christ told her.
[23:29] And in this culture, a woman's witness was not allowed in court. Yet, in the Gospels, in the Gospel of John, this Samaritan woman becomes the first missionary among the Samaritans.

Jesus sends her. And her genuine excitement and sincerity were enough. It was contagious enough that people came out to see for themselves.
And when they see for themselves, we found that in verse 42, they come to faith. Because they say, It is no longer because of what you said that we believe, for we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this is indeed the Savior of the world.
That's ultimately where our confidence in evangelism comes from. It's not our proficiency in apologetics. It's not our expert knowledge of Scripture. It's our faith that Christ will prove himself to be the Savior of the world when we present him to those around us.
If you have not yet trusted in the Lord Jesus for eternal life and salvation, then we urge you to stay with us a while to come and see this Christ that we worship, that we have a relationship with.
[24:41] The proof is in the eating of the pudding, right? Our best argument for the truth of Christianity is Christ himself. It's Christ, his body, he's the church in action. And I trust that when you see Christ in our life and worship as a church, you will join the Samaritans in saying, it is no longer because of what you said that I believe.

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For we have heard for ourselves and we know that this is indeed the Savior of the world. And if you are already a follower of Christ, then I want to exhort you to share Christ with your friends and neighbors.
Simply present Christ to them in the terms that you know, what Christ did for you, what God did for you. Offer to read a book of the Bible with them. And if you have questions, then say, hey, I'll get back to you next week.
I'll go ask some folks at our church. Have faith in the compelling beauty and power of Christ and his word.
have faith in that. Just present them Christ. A friend of mine asked this past week how Christianity first came to Korea, which is where I'm from originally.
[25:55] And Robert J. Thomas, Robert Germain Thomas was the Welsh missionary who first preached the gospel. Well, he didn't exactly get to preach the gospel, but he went to South Korea.

Because he was originally missionary to China and he had done faithful ministry there, but he had a burning desire to share the gospel in Korea also because Korea was at the time known as the Hermit Kingdom. There was no access to the gospel because he knew the purpose of Christ's mission to reach the whole, not just a section of the world.
He had a passion for missions. And so he gathered together the limited resources he had and started learning the language. And in 1866, he learned that an American boat named the General Sherman was going to try to establish trade relations with Korea.
And so he offered himself to accompany the boat as an interpreter, even though he was probably not a very competent interpreter at the time in exchange for an opportunity to spread the gospel.
And as the ship approached the coast of Korea, Robert started tossing gospel tracts onto the riverbank as the ship proceeded. But Korea, having observed how Westerners mistreated China, they were leery of foreigners at the time.
[27:09] So when they saw the ship, Korean officials ordered the American boat to leave at once.
And when they did not leave at once, they started attacking the ship. And as the sailors fled from the boat and the Koreans were being killed, I mean the Koreans were killing the Americans, the truth to his mission and understanding the priority of Christ's mission and counting even his survival as secondary to sharing the gospel, Robert Germain Thomas leapt from the boat carrying a Bible and yelled, Jesus, Jesus.

And he offered these Chinese Bibles because there were no Korean Bibles to the Koreans. And Koreans at the time knew Chinese. A lot of them spoke and read Chinese. And you would think some miracle would have happened to intercept this, but sadly, he was promptly beheaded with the machete.
That's all he got to do. Leave his Bible, yell Jesus, Jesus, and die. But God worked in the heart of the man who killed Robert.
Convinced by Robert's beaming face at the time of his death, he was convinced that he killed a good man. So he kept one of the Bibles. He took it home and then ripped it apart to use it as wallpaper.
And people from near and far came to read what was on his wall. And in a wonderful picture of the partnership we have in gospel ministry, others whom Robert didn't even know reaped from his labor and sacrifice.
[28:45] And the nephew of Robert's killer became a pastor. And today, about just 150 years later, 30% of South Koreans are Christians.

14 million believers. And they send just more missionaries than any other country in the world except for the U.S. that. All he did, he recognized the purpose, the priority.
All he did was present Christ to them. He couldn't even do a good job at that. He left the Bible. We too have an integral part to play in advancing the mission of Christ to save the world.
So let's consider that, the purpose, the priority, the partnership of this mission and then give ourselves wholeheartedly as a church to that mission. Let's pray together.
Let's pray together. God, this is not a burden or an obligation for us because as we remember that you, the great shepherd, came to seek us out, your lost sheep, because you gave your life, your life of inestimable worth, value.
[30:24] You gave your life for us to save us and remember that, Lord, it is our joy and it is our privilege to partake in this mission, your mission to save the world.

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Lord, Lord, would you empower us? Would you so captivate us so that this becomes our overriding desire and priority?
In Jesus' name we pray. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

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