

Mission Manifests the Kingdom

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Preacher: Steve Osmond

[0 : 00] Well, a very good morning to you and greetings in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ this morning. It is absolutely wonderful to be with you all here at Carloway.

And as Gordon said, it is my first time here and I've been just so warmly welcomed. So thank you already for that. I do feel just blessed to be with you. As you can hear already, I'm not really from around here.

I'm a little further south in South Africa. But I just absolutely love working with the ministry of Solus, the Solus Center for Public Christianity.

And part of the work that I do is really getting all around the country. And I get the great privilege of being able to come and meet different congregations and just worship alongside them on Sundays as we are today, this Lord's Day.

So if you don't know much about Solus, we are a ministry that exists to equip the church for evangelism. That is a lot of what I'm doing and that's part of why I'm here this weekend on the island.

[1 : 03] Yesterday we had a great conference up in Stornoway, just doing some equipping, helping people share their faith with a little more confidence. That's one side of what I do.

The other side is actually going and doing the work of evangelism, something that I think the New Testament calls every believer to be doing so, so clearly.

And so that's something that we're going to be speaking about today. Often when I'm out at universities doing evangelistic talks and sharing the gospel at different events, you know, we want to be sharing the truth and the relevance of the Christian faith.

There's a question that comes up and it comes up very, very frequently. And it's phrased in different ways, but it's pretty much this. Why do you Christians feel like you need to share what you believe? Why go and tell others? Why not just leave them alone? That's pretty much the sentiment that we're confronted with very, very often. Not too long ago I shared a video on YouTube and I had this very response in the comment section.

[2 : 11] But it's something that I've been exposed to for many, many years. As I mentioned, I'm from South Africa. And a couple of years ago, my church there was a team that was going out and doing ministry on the streets of Johannesburg.

In the dead of night, it was a ministry that would go out to prostitutes who were working on the streets there. And really to engage them and chat to them and love them well and just show them the love of Christ and clearly proclaim the gospel.

And so I thought, this just sounds brilliant to me. And I tagged along with them. And one night, I was able to have an extended conversation with one lady. And after chatting for a little while, she opened up about her broken family background and all the things that had happened in her life to get her to that point, working on the streets.

And it was a really good conversation. And we had the opportunity to share with her the hope of Jesus Christ, the good news of the gospel, forgiveness of sins and new life with him.

It was just a wonderful opportunity to do that. And then we were able to help her connect with another ministry that really helps women stuck in that position. Anyway, afterwards, I was asked by the ministry team to write up a short reflection on this experience.

[3 : 33] And so I thought, absolutely, I'll happily do that. And so I did that and the piece went out. And a couple of days later, the same kind of response came. Someone put a comment on the article and they pretty much said, what is wrong with you Christians?

Why don't you just leave people alone? It's their choice to live the way that they want. Why do you feel that you need to get involved? Just leave them alone. Now that is, again, the attitude that

people have.

But thinking back to it, I was there. I was there speaking to this lady. I'd heard the stories that she had to tell about the abuse and the desperation that had led her to this position.

And she told us initially, oh no, she loves the work that she's doing. But after just 10 minutes, it was very, very clear. As through tears, she told us about how trapped she was.

And she was only doing this to get money to put food on the table for her children, who thought that she was out doing waitressing work. And so this is the point, really.

[4 : 36] The world is dark and the world is broken and it desperately needs a savior. Even if it doesn't acknowledge that fact. Even if it's brought into the lie that we are indeed the masters of our own fate.

And so every day as we're going about going to university or going to work or whatever it might be, school, every day we rub shoulders with people who might look like they have it all together on the outside when in fact they are broken and they are desperate for something more.

They're desperate for true and lasting hope, yet they have no idea of where to find that. And so they move from one thing to the next, just searching. Be it money, broken relationships, work, alcohol, abuse of other substances, and on and on and on.

Just in this desperate search for meaning. I think this is so clear as we look at the world around us. A desperate lack of hope, a lack of meaning, and people searching for it, but they just don't know where to find it.

And they bought into the lie that, well, this is just the way life is. Even if deep down we know this isn't the way that it's supposed to be. And so why do you think Christians should be sharing the gospel?

[6 : 00] In the time that we have together this morning, I just want to share some thoughts on this very, very important question. And as we've read together, the launch pad for that is Matthew 13 to 16.

I'm going to very quickly just read it again, and then I'll share some thoughts. Jesus says here in this part of this extended teaching called the Sermon on the Mount, as he's been speaking to the masses, he's been speaking kind of broadly, generally, but then he moves and he starts speaking to them directly in the second person.

He says to them, He goes on, he says, You are the light of the world.

A city set on a hill cannot be hidden, nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house.

In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your goodness, your good works, and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.

[7 : 18] Right. You are the salt of the earth. You are the light of the world. And I think these very words, as much as they were spoken directly to those hearing Jesus on that day, they are so true for us here today.

You are the salt of the earth. You are the light of the world. And Jesus, he uses these simple illustrations, but the point that he is making, I think, comes with great, great force.

And it's simply this. Each of these two things, both salt and light, is essential. It is an essential thing, but it has its necessary effect on its environment only if it is both distinct from it, yet fully involved in it.

Let me say that again. Each of these things, salt and light, they are essential, but they have their necessary effect on their environment only if they are distinct from it, yet fully involved in it.

Right. What does that mean? What do I mean? Salt is different from the bland meat that we're going to be putting it on. But when it is present, it brings out flavor.

[8 : 30] It makes a real, real difference. Now, for me, being South African, and we do indeed love our meat, this is very, very true. I know this well. We have something called biltong.

Does anyone here know what biltong is? It is a sort of cured, dried meat that has been preserved using salt. And so you see the process. The meat is a bit boring.

It's going to go rotten. But if you preserve it well with the salt and other spices, it becomes something quite wonderful, actually, I think. Now, the meat of the biltong is not the salt, but the salt has an effect on it.

It brings out the flavor and preserves it. Simple illustration that Jesus uses, but it is so forceful as he is saying, you are the salt of the earth.

What about light? The light itself is not the darkness. It dispels the darkness, and it makes us see things properly. And so again, a simple illustration.

[9 : 29] A light in a dark room is useless if we've totally covered it up. It does nothing to dispel the darkness. It manifests no illumination. It's just pointless. Why would we do that?

And this is what Jesus is saying. Do you understand what he's getting at? It's not very hard, I don't think. But I think what the challenge is that it's uncomfortable for us.

It's uncomfortable. We like our comfort. We don't like to cause a stir. We don't like to make things awkward with having to share our faith.

It does make us feel a bit apprehensive sometimes. But Jesus says, no, no, no. You were made for a purpose, and life with me as my disciple means that you shine for the glory of God.

And that when others see that, they see that light manifest in my world, they would be so drawn that they can't but come to me and glorify my name and live in the light of God's glorious kingdom.

[10 : 27] And so with that purpose in mind that I think Jesus is calling us to as he's doing this extended teaching on life in the kingdom, because that's really what the sermon is all about, the Sermon on the Mount is all about, let me highlight just three points that I'd like us to consider as we reflect on this idea of the kingdom today.

And the title that I have for us is that mission manifests the kingdom. Mission manifests the kingdom. So that's mission.

Sharing our faith with others actually manifests, it brings the kingdom of God. And I'm going to try to make the case for that just a little this morning. The three points are the reality of the kingdom, the second is the hope of the kingdom, and the third is the emissaries of the kingdom.

I had some slides, but certainly I think my PowerPoint didn't work too well. But very, very simple.

The reality of the kingdom, the hope of the kingdom, and the emissaries of the kingdom. So to that first point, the reality of the kingdom.

What is the kingdom? What are we talking about? It's a really good question. And in some ways it can be quite complicated. You see, we're looking at Jesus' words here about life in the kingdom.

[11 : 42] And as we've just heard from the Sermon on the Mount, it's a good thing, I think, to pause for a moment and to ask what are we actually talking about when we speak about the kingdom of God.

It's important. It's very important. Because when we look at the Gospels, the biographies of the life and ministry of Jesus, we are inescapably confronted with the fact that his message was that the kingdom had come.

Matthew 4.17 says, From that time Jesus began to preach, saying, Repent, for the kingdom of God is at hand. What does he mean?

Mark 1.14-15, Now after John was arrested, Jesus came into Galilee, proclaiming the gospel of God, saying, The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand.

Repent and believe in the gospel, the good news. And so in that context there, what Jesus is doing, he's talking about the gospel and the kingdom of God. He's making this really strong link.

[12 : 44] The gospel is the kingdom of God, this message that he's speaking about. And we see the same thing again in the gospel of Luke. And so what was the good news that Jesus came to declare?

What was the gospel that he himself was talking about all of the time in his ministry? It was that the kingdom of God was at hand, being enacted and being brought into administration by his coming into the world.

And that is part of the good news. The kingdom is at hand. It has come in the coming of the Messiah, Jesus Christ. And so the kingdom of God is what Jesus spoke about, I think, more than any other topic, arguably.

Just in the gospel of Matthew alone, Jesus mentions the kingdom over 50 times, which in a sort of normal size Bible is around one and a half times a page.

So I think if we want to understand Jesus' message and teaching and what the gospel is all about, we need to perhaps take a closer look at what this term meant. So let's do that for just a moment.

[13 : 52] There are different traditions and over the ages, there's been this question of what is the kingdom, what is the main message of Christianity. There have been lots of different answers. But here are just a couple of examples that are maybe partial truths, but not the whole truth.

And so when asked what the gospel and the kingdom is, some people would say, okay, well, it's all about the ethical teaching of Jesus, his teaching about morals and what is right and what is wrong. Yes, absolutely, he taught a lot about that. But that is not, that's not the core, core thing, is it? Or others would say, well, it's mostly about Jesus being our moral example to follow. He shows us what life in the kingdom will look like. He demonstrates that. And when we look at him, we should follow and do just that. Is that what it's about? Well, yes, but that's, again, not the full picture.

Some would say that it's all about stories that we can identify with, like the parables that Jesus tells and then the stories that we see about his life and interactions. And as we read those things in scripture, we enter into them and in some way, we kind of step in and live inside those.

[15:04] Well, you can do that and I think that's something good to do as we reflect and meditate on scripture and Jesus' words. But again, that is not the full message of what Jesus taught about the kingdom.

Some might say that it's all about going to heaven. Now, I think Gordon, as he's mentioned just now, what we see in John 14, John 14, 6, I am the way, the truth, and the life.

No one comes to the Father but through me. Absolutely. Jesus taught that there is one way to heaven and it is through him. And there is a true and real reality of heaven and eternal or an eternity with God one day, whatever that looks like.

So yes, absolutely the Bible is clear on that. But again, that's only part of it. Sadly, I think many, many times people view Christianity as only being about getting to heaven.

And there's this slightly skewed view that you come to Christ purely to get like a get out of jail free card. That it's all about becoming a Christian, you receive God's forgiveness and so it's all about one day.

[16:12] There's no focus on what this life is now. Now, obviously, there's truth to that. There is the absolute reality of heaven.

But again, if that's all it is, I think we've maybe missed something. Okay. The point is that our faith isn't only about going to heaven.

That I think is insufficient. The phrase the kingdom of heaven is about the rule of heaven coming into earth, coming on earth. And that is what Matthew has Jesus talking about when he talks about the kingdom of heaven.

He means that heaven, in other words, the God of heaven is establishing his sovereign rule not just in heaven but on earth as well. Even now as we live in it.

Let me explain that more. So in its right context, I think the phrase the kingdom of heaven means something like God's rule becoming a reality on this earth. And we see a glimpse of that not in its full expression.

[17:17] One day that will come. But even now, through Jesus coming and bringing the kingdom, we see glimpses of it. So in a very poor nutshell, the phrase the kingdom of heaven is all about Jesus taking up his place as Messiah, as a true king and ushering in his kingdom.

And it's a kingdom in which we play a very, very important part. And that is really the main thrust.

So I promise, this builds into the bigger point of the sermon and why we should actually be sharing our faith and be on mission. So stick with me. Before I came up, we sang Psalm 8 and then we read Psalm 8.

Why is that? Psalm 8 is a reflection of what we see happening in Genesis 1. It's a reflection on the order of creation and our place as stewards over creation to basically functionally rule over it.

You see, this was the good created order. There's a reality where God's space, the kingdom of heaven, basically overlapped with earth in this glorious harmony.

[18:29] That's what we see in the picture of the Garden of Eden. That's one of the major points of Genesis 1. And then it's a description of this wonderful unity where God has set up his world and humanity and they're in right relationship with each other.

Humanity and the creator are in good right relationship and we are working as God's emissaries, his almost sub-rulers of this world, tending to it, looking after it, caring for it.

In Genesis 1, 27 and 28 it says, So God created man in his own image. In the image of God he created him. Male and female he created them.

And God blessed them and God said to them, Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it. Subdue it. That is what we are commissioned to do right from the early chapters.

We were set up to be stewards of creation but as we know, if you just read two chapters on after that, in Genesis 3, something goes wrong. Something goes wrong. Humanity went astray and in doing so, the right ordering of things, that good relationship with our creator was broken and sin and death entered the world and that proper setup that we have, that we see in Genesis 1, this beautiful picture of a wonderful life with God, that was broken.

[19 : 47] Sin and death enter and it's all kind of marred and tainted and from then on we see death, we see decay and we see separation from God and we see that all around us still today.

But God in his sovereign wisdom already had his plan of restoration to come and restore things and bring about redemption and start setting things right. Okay, so I know I've said a lot up until this point, so let me just recap.

We're saying there's a reality in which God reigns and that it's a reality in which his will is done in everything and that it is good and that it's working properly.

Right. Then we see that the story of the Bible is that the earth has become a place where God's will is not fully being done in this time in a way because we assert our will over it.

We assert our own will and we go astray and in some way God has allowed us to do that. But then with the arrival of Jesus Christ is the announcement of God's reign to take back his world and start putting things right.

[20 : 59] And for me therein lies the amazing hope. And that's the second point, the hope of the kingdom. First we have the reality of the kingdom, whatever that is, big complex theological truth right there.

And second, we have the hope of the kingdom. this is something very relevant to all of us. It's not some sort of weird pie in the sky irrelevant thing that we just talk about. No, it's real and it is relevant and it brings hope.

Jesus says, you are the salt of the earth, you are the light of the world. And when I read these words of Jesus here in Matthew, I can experience a type of cognitive dissonance.

I'm pretty sure I'm not the only one. Well, what do I mean by that? Well, I don't know about you, but I'm sure that you'll identify with me on this. And it's, I know myself.

I know me. I know how I am. I like to think that I'm somewhat self-aware and that means if I'm honest, I don't feel like I'm the salt of the earth.

[22 : 01] I don't feel like I'm the light of the world as Jesus would say that I am. as Jesus is saying to the disciples. If I'm honest and I look at myself and I look at my life even as someone who's really strived to follow our Lord, I really agree with Paul in Romans 7 where he says, for I do not do the good I want but the evil I do not want is what I keep on doing.

And so we still experience this world outside of us and inside of us that is broken. But here's the hope of the kingdom. When the kingdom of God comes it brings healing and it brings restoration. And it's a restoration of a broken humanity as we are and a broken creation around us. A reality that has begun with Jesus coming to this world and declaring that through him the kingdom has come as we see in the gospels again and again.

And that reality is birthed in us when we draw near to God. That is regeneration through the power of the Holy Spirit. And this happens for the first time to us when we draw near to God in faith and it's an ongoing process as we grow in the Lord.

Something called sanctification and it's a wonderful wonderful thing. I love watching restoration shows. I don't know if you've ever come across them be it you know home makeovers or people going across makeovers but there's something about those that just draws me in.

[23 : 37] And not too long ago I stumbled across a couple of videos on YouTube where this guy would take these really old things that are just absolutely broken and he would restore them.

And one of those things was an old dented rusted just completely mangled Zippo lighter. You know one of those that flicks open and you light it. And in this really cool photography where he does some what do you call it basically fast forwards the whole process you get to see as he takes this thing and he hammers it and he puts it in a chemical bath and he sandblasts this thing and in the hands of this skilled craftsman you see this process of this thing becoming more and more and more of what it is supposed to be.

It's being restored to its proper function. And by the end of the video in the sort of closing scene you see this beautiful thing and he flicks it open and he lights it and there's this beautiful flame flickering there.

And it just it resonates with me. This idea of there's this brokenness but in the hands of the skilled craftsman it is made new. It is restored to function as it's supposed to function to do the thing that it is made to be doing.

And what's the point of that? In the same way Jesus comes to restore us. He came on a mission to manifest his kingdom now and reaching its ultimate fullness when one day he will return in glory to bring that kingdom in its fullness.

[25 : 12] And it's a reality where now we are made new. We are forgiven of our sins we are restored to right relationship with God so that we can function as we're meant to function being God's representatives in this world as good stewards.

And this to me goes right back to Genesis 1 and Psalm 8 as we've read. See when we are restored to right relationship with God and continually draw near to him with open hearts with soft hearts he then uses us for the purposes of his kingdom.

Very much in spite of us I would think. And he does this to bring the reality of the hope of the gospel to a dark world that so desperately needs it. So we've seen the reality of the kingdom the hope of the kingdom and the third point is the emissaries of the kingdom.

The emissaries of the kingdom. I'll make this point short as I bring this to a close. There's an interesting phenomenon that happens to many soldiers when they're in the midst of battle.

Eventually given all the darkness that they see given all the violence and the chaos that they experience around them they can simply just get overwhelmed by all of it and give up.

[26 : 34] Sometimes even forgetting why they were there fighting what they were even fighting for in the first place. So they just batten down the hatches they give up the fight they give in to despair and darkness seems to consume everything and there they are stuck.

And so I have to be honest I think it can often feel that way for us as people who would call themselves followers of Christ people who want to live God's way. We look around at the world and we can see all the brokenness we can see all the darkness and we can just think okay we just need to batten down the hatches.

When we look at our own lives and we experience the sin that we do the things we keep doing as much as we don't want to be doing them and we can get filled with despair can't we?

We can forget our purpose in the hands of the master craftsman. But let me remind you and encourage you of God's purpose. In Colossians 1.13 he says Paul reflecting on the gospel on what Christ has done he says he has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved son.

And so we start with this question of why Christians feel that they should share their faith. Why should we go and share the gospel with people? Well God has stepped in to rescue us.

[28 : 00] He has stepped in to bring the light of his kingdom and in a piece of theology that I just cannot get my mind around. The very creator of everything God himself has found it pleasing to continue to use us to use you and me for his great purposes in demonstrating his kingdom in this world.

I can't understand it but it's true. And it's a kingdom marked by love and righteousness and humility and peace and joy and mercy and truth. So why do Christians feel that they should share the gospel?

It's because it's our mission to manifest that kingdom and shine God's love to the world. And we are his emissaries. We are his representatives.

He has called us to do this. He says you are the light of the world. You are the salt of the earth. That is God has chosen at this time to be reaching the world in this way through us with the Holy Spirit going alongside us.

And he says in the same way call away free church let your light shine before others so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.

[29 : 17] It's amazing to me that God would even just consider using flawed broken people as we all are but God is so gracious that he says this is my great mission to reach the world and I'm going to use you I'm going to commission you to go out to the nations baptizing people in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit.

Won't you bow your heads as we pray together.