

The Mission of Jesus

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Preacher: Martin Ayers

[0 : 0 0] Well, I don't know if you're someone who's easily distracted. I know that I am. Most of us are. We forget our goals and then we start doing something else and we never quite get done what we planned.

The retail industry knows that and supermarkets therefore have their lost leaders. And back in the day, in the 1990s, there was this summer of lost leading madness at supermarkets, which some of you will remember, when there was a price war over the price of baked beans. It started with Aldi advertising how much their own brand baked beans cost.

And so Tesco, fearing that people would leave, dramatically cut the price of their baked beans. And within a few days, they cut it to three pence a can. And so they had to limit how many baked beans you bought.

You weren't allowed to buy more than four cans when you went to Tesco because people were kind of trying to buy trolley loads of the stuff. In fact, in Middlesbrough, where I live, where I grew up at the time, where I lived, there was a grocer's that reacted to Tesco's price war by charging a negative price for their baked beans.

So when you went in, if you asked for baked beans, they gave you some baked beans and some money. They gave you kind of 2p and a can so that the cost of your baked beans was minus 2p a can. And we all thought, this is great, we're quids in here.

[1 : 2 1] But of course, Tesco are way ahead of us. Because they know that hardly anyone is single-minded enough to walk into a Tesco and just come out with baked beans.

Of course, you go in and everything, you know, the first thing you see when you walk in is all the fresh fruit and veg. And you think, this is a really fresh shop. Everything in here is going to be fresh.

And so you go around and then there's the bargains at the end of every aisle. And before you know it, you've walked out with bags full of stuff. You can barely remember the baked beans that you went in for. We get distracted. And that happens as well with the internet.

So there's this word WILF, this phenomenon, WILFing. WILF stands for, what was I looking for? Which is for this thing where you go on the internet to look for something and then there's this link to something else.

And it catches your eye and you click on that and then you're in something else. And you're reading an article and then there's another link. And before you know it, you're sort of reading about Donald Trump's wardrobe or something. And you've completely forgotten why you went onto the internet in the first place.

[2 : 2 2] We forget what our goal is and we get distracted. But it can happen as a Christian. As a follower of Jesus Christ. And it can happen as a church.

A church like St. Silas where there's so much energy and activity. Can drift into being a hive of activity. But the individuals and the groups within a church start to lose sight of the main goal.

What's the overarching goal? So it's vitally important that we don't miss what Jesus Christ said about his goal. What did he come to do for us?

What does he most want to do for other people today? So Matthew 9 is a crucial passage in the Bible. In fact, Matthew 9 answers a question that we should be asking as you read Matthew.

It's sometimes helpful to think, what if I was reading this for the first time? There's a real tension in the narrative. And we know that because Jesus has been establishing his authority.

[3 : 26] In chapters 5 to 7, he established his authority through his teaching in the Sermon on the Mount. And we know that's what he was doing. Because at the end of chapter 7, I don't know if you remember this, but chapter 7 verse 28, Matthew tells us this.

When Jesus had finished saying these things, the crowd were amazed at his teaching because he taught as one who had authority. And we should still be amazed today.

One thing that I reckon every thinking person today has to make sense of is where did Jesus' teaching come from? It makes sense if he really was a man sent from God.

But if he wasn't sent from God, if that's what you decide, where did his teaching come from? It's remarkable when you think about it that this unschooled carpenter spoke words so profound that still today millions of people hang on his every word.

It's amazing. He taught with the authority of God. Then in chapter 8, he confirmed his authority by demonstrating that he had this supernatural power.

[4 : 31] And that's what we've been looking at the last couple of weeks. Authority over sickness, over nature, over everything. And he uses that authority with this unparalleled compassion as he heals people and he rescues his followers from a storm.

And he drives out demons to save these two outcasts who've been possessed. And you realise Jesus has announced his arrival into the world as God's promised rescuing king.

The long-awaited king is here. But the question that we should be asking is, what's he here for? What's he come to do? And that's the question that the demons ask of him in chapter 8, verse 29.

If you just look, we saw it last week. The demons say, what do you want with us, son of God? Have you come here to torture us before the appointed time?

They know that there is an appointed day, and we should know it as well, when the Christ is going to come at the end of the world, the day of the Lord. And he will fully and finally bring in his kingdom, and he'll take away evil and suffering forever.

[5 : 38] But what is Jesus doing walking around in Israel in 30 AD? 2,000 years on, why is the world still going on? What is the mission of Jesus?

And now we find out. Our first point, Jesus is the son of man on a mission to forgive sins. So he crossed the Sea of Galilee with him again, back to Capernaum.

And Matthew gets straight to the point, doesn't he, in verse 2. Some men brought to him a paralyzed man, lying on a mat. What's remarkable here is, do you notice, Matthew doesn't even tell us the detail that we know from Mark and Luke, the extraordinary detail of how this man was brought in.

The room is too busy, they can't get him in. They go onto the roof, they take the tiles off, and they lower him in. Matthew doesn't tell us what happened, because Matthew wants to get straight to what Jesus says.

Verse 2, When Jesus saw their faith, he said to the man, Take heart, son. Your sins are forgiven. Just imagine that you're there.

[6 : 46] Jesus is teaching. You're all crammed in. A man is lowered in, in front of you, because he's paralyzed. And Jesus says, Your sins are forgiven.

What would you think? I reckon I'd have thought, This guy, Jesus, He's a bit of a nutter. The man hasn't come for forgiveness.

He's come because he wants to walk again. But Jesus says, Take heart. He seems to know that on the inside, this man has a far greater problem, a hidden problem, that he's guilty.

And it shows us, doesn't it, that sin clearly isn't what the world out there understands sin to be. Which tends to be doing some really bad stuff. It's hard to imagine, how much really bad stuff, a first century paralytic could actually do, isn't it?

I mean, he couldn't really get into fights. He couldn't burgle anyone. He couldn't walk. But sin is just the Bible's word, for turning away from God. Failing to treat him as God.

[7 : 58] And we're all guilty of that. Now, there's not usually a direct link between someone's personal suffering, like this man, and their personal rejection of God.

That's not normally a direct connection. But generally, the reason why there is suffering in this world is because there is sin in the world. The reason that the world isn't the way it should be is because we're not the way we should be.

In other words, the heart of the human problem is the problem of the human heart. And there's nothing that we can do about it. So we love to think of ourselves as free. But the Bible helps us understand that in truth, our hearts are bent on turning away from God.

So that when Jesus sees this man who can't walk, he sees a deeper burden that needs lifting. And he says to him, take heart, son.

Your sins are forgiven. But he can't get away with saying that. Look at verse 3. At this, some of the teachers of the law said to themselves, this fellow is blaspheming.

[9 : 09] You can see their objection. It's God who's wronged by sin. So surely only God can forgive. Isn't it blasphemy? And yet to respond to Jesus in that way, accusing him of speaking against God, that is sin.

Verse 4. Knowing their thoughts, Jesus said, why do you entertain evil thoughts in your hearts? These are the religious guys, the Bible guys, who don't think they're sinners, but their treatment of Jesus shows that they've got a real problem.

And then, the astonishing proof, which is easier, to say your sins are forgiven, or to say, get up and walk.

I take it that there and then, if you say you have the authority to forgive sins, nobody quite knows. If you say get up and walk, then your authority is on the line for everyone to see.

Verse 6. But so that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins, then he said to the paralyzed man, get up, take your mat and go home.

[10 : 26] Then the man got up and went home. When the crowd saw this, they were filled with awe and they praised God who'd given such authority to man.

Jesus is on a mission to forgive sins because sin is our biggest problem. Just think about this paralyzed man. I'm going to extrapolate, but work with me.

His wife saw him carried off that morning by his friends, full of hope that that day might be the day. She waits at home worried that it would go wrong. Maybe he won't get to Jesus.

Maybe Jesus won't heal him. And then she sees her husband, legs working, muscles miraculously formed, dancing up the drive and she rushes out full of joy to see him.

What happened? She says. Well, it was amazing. He says. Jesus just spoke and suddenly my legs were strong and I could get up and walk and there were hugs and there's joy and there's joy and there's celebration.

[11 : 31] And the man says, and do you know what? Jesus said something else as well. He said to me, your sins are forgiven. I don't know what to make of that. Anyway, the years go by and the man carries on walking until he grows old and then he dies.

And the next thing he knows, he's at the gates of heaven and the gatekeeper says, come in. We've been expecting you. Welcome. It's perfect inside. You're going to love it here.

And the man says, what do you mean? Come in. I can't go in there. You should see my track record. I've done some really bad stuff. And the gatekeeper says, really? Well, don't worry about that.

I've got the list here of the names and your name's on here and it says here, there's nothing on you. And the man says, well, your list is wrong. I didn't treat God as the center of my life every day.

And the gatekeeper says, well, don't worry about that. Jesus is in charge here. And he says, there's nothing on you. Come in. And the man says, that's amazing.

[12 : 35] How long can I stay? And the gatekeeper says, forever. You can stay forever. Did it matter that the man could walk again that day?

Of course it did. Of course it mattered. How much more did it matter that he was forgiven? So let me ask you, what are the problems in your life today?

I'm sure there are big problems, serious problems that matter. They matter to you and they matter to Jesus. But do you see that Jesus has come to deal with our biggest problem? I heard of a missionary couple who went, so they went overseas to talk to people about Jesus and it was a disaster.

They had an awful time and they were being interviewed by a church that had sent them out and they were talking about the problems that they'd had in their mission and the interviewer said, that's awful.

How did you keep going? How did you manage to keep going through all of that? And the guy said, well, we just had to keep telling each other our biggest problem has been dealt with and it's true words for you this morning if you trust Jesus.

[13 : 48] Your biggest problem has been dealt with by him. Take heart, son. Take heart, daughter. Your biggest problem has been dealt with.

So if that's Jesus' mission, is it really going to fly? Is it going to work? Who's going to accept Jesus' mission to forgive sins? Especially today. I mean, yeah, maybe religious people will be interested in this, but what about your kind of irreligious people?

Why would they accept that they need forgiveness? How do we engage people? Well, our second point is that Jesus is the doctor on a mission that reaches outsiders.

In verse 9, Jesus meets somebody who in religious terms is completely beyond the pale. Verse 9, as Jesus went on from there, he saw a man named Matthew sitting at the tax collector's booth follow me, he told him.

And Matthew got up and followed him. So Matthew, who wrote this gospel, was a tax collector. These were the guys who had shoved two fingers up at the religious establishment and they'd opted instead to make money for the Romans and it made them rich.

[15 : 05] So, we can assume that Matthew had cash, he had influence, friends, a big house, a great lifestyle. The kind of lifestyle that we envy.

And the religious people at the time, they used to think about holiness a bit like we think about hygiene. You know, so if we know someone's ill, we sort of avoid them in case we catch the germs.

And you get these surveys about hygiene, about where you find germs so that we can avoid those places. And I read recently that one of the worst places for germs is the armrest on the inside door of the back seat of a taxi cab.

So if you're in a cab, sit in the middle because there's this real problem with... Anyway, the thing is that they have this issue with sin. They thought if you were religious in the day, if somebody wasn't trying to live for God, they were a sinner and you had to avoid them or you could become a sinner as well.

And then Jesus arrives and he just chooses Matthew and he calls him, follow me. And Matthew's response is very dramatic, isn't it? He leaves behind his old way of life.

[16 : 18] He gets up from the tax collector's booth because he wants to answer the call of Jesus. He's the model disciple. Last week we had two bad models.

This is our good model. Jesus calls you, follow me. And no matter how messy your life has been, you get up, you leave behind your wrongdoing and you trust and follow him.

And in the next scene, things get even more offensive for the religious people. Verse 10. While Jesus was having dinner at Matthew's house, many tax collectors and sinners came and ate with him and his disciples.

So this is a collection of the men and women who you would have thought were the least likely people you'd ever see in a church building. And they're the ones eating with Jesus.

Eating with him is very significant because in the last chapter, chapter 8, Jesus talked about heaven like a banquet. And here he is showing us the kind of person who's on the guest list.

[17 : 25] Shockingly, religion doesn't get you into the banquet. It's a tragic misunderstanding. It was then. It is today. Religions give you a set of moral rules that allow you to think of yourself as better than other people.

To think, well, they're the sinners around here. I'm not. I'm trying to keep these rules. But that mindset is very dangerous. If Jesus is on a mission to save sinners, then to take your place at the fellowship meal with him, you've got to accept that you're a sinner.

So the outsiders who know they need saving, they've joined the party. But the insiders, the religiously devout, where are they? They're on the outside.

Verse 11. When the Pharisees saw this, they asked his disciples, why does your teacher, not ours, your teacher, why does he eat with tax collectors and sinners?

On hearing this, Jesus said, it is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. But go and learn what this means. I desire mercy, not sacrifice.

[18 : 38] For I have come not to call the righteous, but sinners. Well, Kathy and I have just moved here to Glasgow. I've not been to the doctors yet.

Why not? It's obvious, isn't it? It's because I haven't been sick, so I haven't gone to the doctors. You don't go to the doctors when you're healthy. Well, it's the same with the mission of Jesus. He's come to forgive sins, to spiritually heal people.

It's only natural. He wants to spend his time with the spiritually sick and declare that they are better. But the sharp point is that sometimes, and we see this today, don't we?

We know people who don't go to the doctors even though they are sick. They won't admit that there's something wrong with them. But when it comes to sin, the Pharisees, they're taking bad medicine, the bad medicine of religion, and they won't admit they've got a problem.

So Jesus sends them away in love to reflect on an Old Testament passage. It's in Hosea 6, where God was accusing his people. Now, the people of God went into exile.

[19 : 43] They were pushed out from fellowship with God. And the problem in Hosea 6 was that the people were still going to the temple. They were still making sacrifices, but in their hearts, behind the thin veneer of religion, they'd rejected God.

Will the Pharisees accept that they need to be saved from their sin? And so for us today, without Jesus Christ, I am spiritually very, very sick.

When it comes to being right with God, it doesn't matter how often I've been to church, it doesn't matter how many rules I've tried to keep, the only thing that I contribute to my salvation is the sin that I bring from which I have to be redeemed by Jesus.

And that's what Jesus has come to do, wonderfully. So just think of where you see a crowd in your living week.

Maybe at the rugby or at the football. maybe in a shopping mall as you go up in a glass lift and look down or going up the escalator. Think of the faces that you see one by one.

[20 : 55] For every single person, what is their greatest need? Sinners in need of a saviour. It's true of people coming in and out of the mosques of Glasgow on a Friday in their droves.

The faces that you see in Starbucks or on the subway. The people coming in to use the food banks at Glasgow City Mission. The refugees pouring through Europe's borders.

Sinners whose greatest need is a saviour. And Matthew's story should give us great hope. For here is the man, Matthew, you would have thought least likely to be interested in Jesus' offer.

Least likely to be convicted of his own spiritual sickness. He hears the call from Jesus, he leaves everything, and he follows him.

So who are you ruling out? Let me ask, is there a type of person you can think of where you think they're not going to be interested? Matthew was, the irreligious wealthy hedonist was, and now he's at the feast.

[22 : 09] Christ. So how does this make us feel, this mission of Jesus? Well, we've heard he's the son of man on a mission to forgive sin. He's the doctor on a mission that reaches outsiders.

Thirdly, and more briefly, he's the bridegroom on a mission that brings joy. See, John the Baptist's followers come, and they ask Jesus' disciples why they don't fast.

Well, they ask Jesus why his disciples don't fast. Fasting was this important Old Testament discipline. They were practicing it. The Pharisees, then, they have a religious framework, and they're in danger of rejecting Jesus because he won't fit their preconceived framework.

John the Baptist's disciples are in danger as well, but they go and see Jesus, and they ask him. So to explain what's going on, Jesus uses a startling image.

Look at verse 15. How can the guests of the bridegroom mourn while he is with them? The time will come when the bridegroom will be taken from them, then they will fast.

[23 : 17] Well, that time is coming, but in other words, while Jesus is with his people, it's time to celebrate. And it's remarkable language because this picture of the bride as God's people and the bridegroom was familiar from the Old Testament, but God was the bridegroom.

God, the bridegroom, has come into the world to pull his bride out of the gutter, to clean her up from her old way of life, her spiritual adultery, and to make her faithful to him.

And so while they are together, it's a time of partying and joy. But if you come to Jesus with a framework and you judge him by it, you miss out.

God. So Jesus uses these two parables to help us understand how he relates to the old regime, the Old Testament regime, the Mosaic code, if you like, the law of God from Moses that people have been living under.

First he talks about cloth. He says how you can't just stitch a new piece of cloth on old clothing. It doesn't work. It's the same with wineskins, these leather wineskins.

[24 : 26] The leather became brittle and if you put new wine in when it fermented and expanded, it broke the wineskin. Jesus says that's what it's like, him coming and the Old Testament law. You can't fit him in with it anymore.

The Old Testament is fulfilled in him. It points to him. But now that he's here, there is a radical newness about what he is bringing on his mission to save sins. And we see that today, don't we?

We should see it more. This is a new age where we don't have priests anymore to stand between us and God. Jesus is our priest. We can all know God through him.

No need for priests. It's a new age where we don't have altars anymore. We don't need to make a sacrifice to put us right with God because Jesus has made his once for all sacrifice on our behalf.

We don't need altars. It's a new age where we don't have holy places anymore. Jesus has come. He's the holy place embodying the presence of God. We don't need holy places.

[25 : 26] Jesus makes things new. And it's a time of joy. So I started by asking whether we're easily distractible people.

And I want to urge you this morning to take the opportunity that God gives us to reset your compass, to realign yourself and your life with the mission of Jesus.

There is an appointed time when he will come in glory to judge the world and put the world right and his kingdom will last forever after that. He's demonstrated that he has the power to do that in Matthew chapter 8.

But he's coming to our world early. Why? Not primarily to be a moral example to show us how to live. Not primarily to alleviate poverty or to care for the sick and the suffering and the lonely.

Not primarily to seek social justice for the world. Please don't hear me say that any of those things are unimportant. They're all really important things.

[26 : 30] But they're not the main thing. This is the main thing. The overarching mission of Jesus is to save sinners. And the reason Jesus hasn't come back yet is because he's giving more time because he wants more sinners to be saved.

We as St. Silas, we as his body continue that mission today. So will you make Jesus' mission into your primary life goal?

It's a mission that can reach anyone, even the outsiders. And it's a mission that leads to joy. The joy of a wedding feast. Why? Well because if you're a Christian here this morning, please reflect this week on the truth that the story of the paralyzed man is your story.

For you were once crippled by a burden of guilt and Jesus looked down at you and said, take heart son, take heart daughter, your sins are forgiven.

Reflect that Matthew's story is your story. Jesus saw you, he chose you, he picked you out, he said follow me and now you're on the guest list for the feast.

[27 : 52] Let's pray together. Father God, we thank you that you sent Jesus Christ into our world with the authority to forgive sins.

Thank you that he went to the cross to bear the burden of our sin so that he could invite us to have a fresh start and follow him. And so Father God, we pray that by your spirit you'll help each one of us and help us as a church family to reflect the mission of the Lord Jesus.

To strive to promote your gospel by our words and our actions so that many more people will turn to Jesus and be saved from their sins. For our joy and for your glory we pray.

Amen. Amen. Amen.