

The Gospel and Mission: Being an attractive people

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[0 : 00] My name is Chris. I help oversee the community groups here at Watermark Church. And today, as Tobin has already mentioned, we are going to be looking at the gospel and mission.

We've been looking at a series of the gospel and work. Next week, we're going to look at the gospel and community. And you may think we've heard this all before, and you probably have.

But the thing is, as Tobin said earlier, we sometimes have memories like goldfish. And we need reminding. We need reminding of who we are and what we're about.

So today, we're going to talk about this value of mission. Now, everyone is on a mission. Some people's mission is very obvious. They just want to make as much money as they can and then retire early.

And their mission drives their behavior, so they will work crazily long hours. They will sacrifice anything, sacrifice their family time. They will trample over other people just to get as much money as they can.

[1 : 06] Other people's mission in life is a little bit more subtle. They just want to be as comfortable as they can and avoid as much pain and suffering. So what they do is they have already looked at the calendar for the next five years and worked out when the public holidays are going to be.

They've marked off the possible days to take sick leave. And they're praying for tomorrow that Typhoon 8 is still going to be going. Even companies have mission statements which are meant to encapsulate what their mission is all about.

I need some participation here. I'm going to give you a couple of mission statements from companies. I want you to tell me what the company is. It's not too difficult.

Well, let's see. Our mission is to inspire and nurture the human spirit. One person, one cup, and one neighborhood at a time.

Oh, you go too often. Okay, next one. Our mission is to refresh the world, inspiring moments of optimism and happiness, creating value and making a difference.

[2 : 28] Not Google. This is one very dear to Tobin's heart. Ah, yes. Very good. Coca-Cola. I don't know how many moments you've been inspired with optimism and happiness when you drink Coca-Cola.

Okay, last one. Our mission is to be the ultimate house of luxury, defining style, and creating desire now and forever.

The number five might help you. Chanel. Okay. So you see, companies have mission statements, and a mission which is meant to drive the way that they do business.

Your mission should drive and shape your behavior. So as we come to talk about us as watermark and us as Christians, what does it mean?

What is our mission? Now, mission simply means to be sent. What is the mission we're sent on? Well, Jesus says in that passage in John 20, he says, as the Father has sent me, so I send you.

[3 : 45] So what is the mission we're sent on? Well, it's the mission that Jesus was on. So then you've got to ask, what is the mission that Jesus was on? And Jesus says in John chapter 7, he says, my mission is really to make God known, to make the goodness and the greatness of God known.

And how do I do that? I do that through seeking and saving lost people. I do that through dying on a cross to bring people back to myself, to bring people back to relationship with God.

That was Jesus' mission, to make God known so that people can come into relationship with him. So what is our mission as Christians? It's the same.

To make the goodness and greatness of God known through our words and through our lives and call people back to that relationship with God. So here's the main thing I want to say.

If you just zone off after this, that's fine. But the main thing I want you to remember is this. God's primary mission strategy for the world is his church.

[4 : 51] God's primary mission strategy for the world is his church. And his strategy is this. That the lives of Christians should be so attractive that people look at them and admire and say, I'd love to live like that.

That your kids look at your lives and say, I want to be like my parents. That people from other religions look at Watermark community and say, I wish we were part of a community like that.

God's mission strategy is our lives to reflect his goodness and how amazing he is.

Now, if you're like me, you kind of think about the reality of your own life and you feel, wow, I fall so far short of that calling.

So how do we come to live who we are? Well, I've got three main points. The first one is just knowing your identity. The second is living your identity.

[6 : 00] And the third is living out mission in the day to day. Okay? So knowing your identity, living your identity, living out your mission in the day to day. Your behavior flows out from your sense of identity and who you are.

And so we're going to come and have a look at this passage in 1 Peter. If you've got your bulletin, turn with me. This passage in 1 Peter is, remember, this is written by Peter, one of the disciples of Jesus.

And it's written to small groups of churches which are scattered around Turkey. And these churches are having a hard time because they're living in a very hostile world.

They're living in the midst of the Roman Empire, which dominates everywhere. And the Roman Empire tells you, you need to worship the emperor and the gods that he worships.

And if you want to move up the career ladder, you've got to join guilds, associations, where part of the initiation into those associations is you have to offer sacrifices to the emperor and to the gods.

[7 : 11] Everywhere you go, there are statues, who's shouting to you, you need to worship this god and this god over here. And the Christians, who knew that that's not what they were meant to be doing, struggled because everyone was laughing at them, mocking them.

Why would you? Listen, you can join the Roman Empire and you can have everything you want. You can have your ambitions. You can have all those things. And yet you're choosing to stay as a Christian. Why would you do that?

Now, this is who Peter's talking about. They're marginalized. They're feeling on the edge of society, these Christians. They're what Peter calls aliens and strangers.

They feel like they don't belong. And Peter says to them, don't you realize you're not called to be like everybody else? You are a people on the margins.

But you're a people who dance to a different beat. You're a people who are different, not because you've got crazy hairstyles or you live like the Amish, not because you're separated from people physically, but because your life is different.

[8 : 17] Now, I don't know about you, but in Hong Kong, I think there's many similarities with this. We all want to belong in this society.

We all want to fit in. We all want to feel like we're accepted. I don't know about you. When I used to have my former colleagues, I used to be sitting around, and sometimes people just start criticizing another colleague or just saying negative things, complaining about certain things, and you knew it wasn't right, but I would just find myself just kind of joining in with them.

I don't know if you ever do that. Maybe it's just me. But I would join in. Why was I joining? And I'd think after, oh, I wish I hadn't said that. Why? Because I wanted to belong. I wanted to fit in.

I wanted to be accepted by them. And so I went along with everything that they went along with. I want to be accepted. I want to belong. It's what the society calls peer pressure.

But actually, it's just a desire to belong. We want to be accepted. We want to be liked. We want to be valued. And Peter tells you, well, Peter tells them something mind-blowing.

[9 : 31] If you look in verse 9, he says, Listen, I know you want to belong to what everyone else is telling you to belong to. But he says, Don't you know who you are?

Verse 9. But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God's own possession.

These are four terms that any reader of the Old Testament would have been familiar with. Because these were four terms that were used for the people of God, God's special chosen people in the Old Testament.

And what are they saying? They're saying, You belong, not to the world, but you belong to God. You are His. You have access to a relationship with the God of all creation.

And that's what priesthood is about. Only the priests could have access to God into His presence. You have access like nobody else has access.

[10 : 35] And you are set apart for Him. That's what the word holy means. You are set apart for Him. And notice what he's saying is, he says, You, and normally when we read you, we think me.

But actually that you is a plural. He's saying you as the church are His special people. You are set apart. Now, I don't know when you were younger, but when I was younger, people used to play.

We had a playground at school. And people used to pick teams for games. So, we used to play football, soccer, in the playground. And, when it came to choosing the teams, the good kids always got chosen first.

And, you know, there was the kid at the end who no one wanted. Did you ever have that? And people were fighting not to have him. They were saying, Listen, no, you have him.

You have him. We had him last week. No, no. Oh, just take him. Go and sit at the back. And that kid, when I was at school, he always wanted to be one of the people who was chosen at the first.

[11 : 51] He always wanted to belong in the team, but always felt like he was outside. He always wanted to belong. But, if you imagine that one day the most famous footballer in the world came to that school and said, I've got a team that I'm picking players for.

And, and he comes in and all the kids are kind of there. Yeah, yeah, yeah. Choose me. Choose me. Look at what I've done. I'm really good. And what he does, he goes to the kid that nobody else wants and he says, I want you in my team.

And it's not that I just want you in my team. I'm going to spend time with you. I'm going to hang out with you. I want you to be with me. To be a part of my team.

And now, imagine how that kid would feel. Doesn't that change the perspective now when he feels rejected from the other teams but he knows that he is now part of a team that is so much better.

And all of us are like that kid, Peter tells us. We were not a people, he says. But now, you are a people.

[13 : 17] All of us, if you were a Christian, you were part of God's family. You were part of his people. And what that means is this.

It means you're set apart for him but it also means that you'll be an alien and a stranger. Jesus was rejected by people. So you will also experience not belonging in this world.

That's the first point. The second point is, if we are a new people, as it were, what are we for? Is it just to hide away by ourselves, kind of enjoy the relationship with God?

And Peter says, no, that's not what it's about. It's not all about you. Look at verse 9 again. So he says, you are this chosen people, this chosen race, royal priesthood, people for God's own possession, so that, so that you may proclaim the excellences of him who has called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.

What does that mean? Why has God saved you? Why has God brought you, if you are a Christian today, why has he brought you into his family? He saved you for a purpose. He saved you for the purpose of making him known, proclaiming his excellences, his goodness, his greatness, how amazing he is.

[14 : 47] And that mission is to shape all of life. It's to shape the decisions we make, the way we spend our money, the way we spend our time.

It's meant to be a shaping influence if we really are this people that God has set apart for himself. And actually, that word proclaim, in Greek, it can mean praise, tell out, but it can also mean to advertise.

Your life is to be an advertisement. And not just your words, but it's every part of your life, your words, your actions, is to show how amazing God is.

Now, I don't know about you, but I'm a bit suspicious of advertisers and salespeople in general. And I know there's a few of you among here, so I've got to be careful what I say.

But the thing that gets me about advertisers is that they're always trying to sell you something, but they're not really interested in you. Even when they're trying to appeal to your personal needs and things, you know what they're trying to do is they're trying to sell.

[15 : 57] something to you. You know, you see these things because you're worth it. And I look at that and I think, no, because you want my money. And even, you think of, like, tele-sales people.

I don't know if you've ever had this, where they ring you up and it's like, hi, thank you as a valued customer. we would just like to do a survey on customer satisfaction.

And you think, okay, let's go on. And 30 seconds later, you suddenly realize they're actually trying to sell you something. And at that point, in my most polite, angry British voice, I say, thank you very much, and I put the phone down.

Because they're kind of being underhand. They're not really interested in me. they want to sell me a product or a service. And so often, the world sees Christians trying to sell Jesus as a product or a service.

You know, come to Jesus and he'll fix all your problems. He'll give you a great life. Come to Jesus, get the Father and the Holy Spirit for free. You know, we're, we're not, we're not selling a product or a service.

[17 : 17] When, when it, we talk about being advertising, we're not selling a product or a serving, service. We're living adverts of a relationship with the king that we were created to have relationship with.

That everybody who is chasing after belonging, acceptance, everything in the world is truly, truly made for. Where they were made to find satisfaction.

So what that means, as a Christian, we don't have to use kind of underhand tactics to try and get people kind of, to come along to church. I mean, you see sometimes, you know, I've, I've heard people, and I've done this myself, you know, we've got a, a great buffet lunch this Sunday.

You know, you, you should come along. It's, it's going to be fantastic. Food was great and everything. And they say, okay, yeah, where is it? Oh, it's down at Cyberport. And you say, okay, great.

And, and there'll be a little bit of church beforehand. But don't worry, the food is fantastic. If we had to be these people who have proclaimed the extences, we don't have to be trying to be underhand about, no, it's a relationship that we're advertising.

[18 : 32] So we can be open about our motivation just to say, I want you to come to know the living God who is amazing. That's what I want for you.

And if you're genuinely concerned about people, genuinely interested, not just trying to sell them something, but genuinely interested in them, people will honor your integrity.

When we were in Austria on our, on our honeymoon, we were told about a, a local guest house where you could get food. We were looking around for restaurants and, and we went down to this restaurant, just kind of checked it out and thought, okay, the food's, the food's pretty good and then we started talking to a couple who'd been there, who'd been coming back to the same place for 18 years.

Now, I know some people like that, so instantly I'm kind of like, okay, I kind of write them off in that kind of corner. And, and, and then they started talking about the owner and, um, they started sharing how incredibly generous and hospitable the owner was.

And I'm thinking, okay, that's great. And as they, they taught, they shared story after story about the, the owner and the more impressive she sounded. But I'm naturally cynical. It's part of British education.

[19 : 50] We have, we have classes in cynicism. It's called, um, critical thinking. Um, um, and so I was kind of a bit suspicious.

Yeah, okay, yeah, I've seen those people before. They're, they're really just after to get your money. They're just nice, they're polite just to get your money. You've been coming back for 18 years. You've really fallen for it. But, you know, after a while, we, we saw this couple talking to the owner and, um, she mentioned, I heard them mention that we were on honeymoon.

We mentioned to this couple that we're on honeymoon and, um, they spoke to the owner and said, oh, these guys are on honeymoon. One minute later, the owner comes out with a free bottle of champagne, pours out the champagne for us, and then starts taking a real interest in asking us questions about, about our lives.

And, and then as I observed her, I saw the way that she was just really genuinely interested in people. She, she would take out candy and sweets for kids as they were leaving.

She would really take an interest and a pride in what she was doing and wanted to know how people were. And I began to see why this couple had been coming back for 18 years. And so, from that moment on, we were converted.

[21 : 04] We became the greatest missionaries for that restaurant that you could imagine in the whole region. Because, we'd heard the message from this couple, but then we had seen it, we had tasted it, we had experienced it for ourselves, and we saw how it worked.

And we were convinced. And it's the same with the gospel message, proclaiming God. Many people will hear you say, oh, God's amazing, and you say, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah, I've heard that one before.

But actually, what is it that's going to attract people? It's going to be lives which are genuinely interested in people, genuinely loving people, genuinely taking concern and care for people.

That's why, if you look in verse 11 and 12, Peter says, beloved, I urge you, as aliens and strangers, you don't belong, you're a different community, abstain from fleshly lusts or sinful desires, which wage war against the soul.

Keep your behavior excellent among the Gentiles. Another translation, it says, live such good lives among the people around you.

[22 : 19] so that in the thing in which they slander you as evildoers, they may, because of your good deeds, and they observe them, they see them, they will glorify God in the day of visitation.

There are two things here. How do we live attractive lives? One is something we don't do, which is we abstain from sinful desires. Tobin has talked in the last two weeks about coveting, worry, control.

these things are not just to make us a bit better for ourselves. These things are meant to be a mission strategy, whoops, a mission strategy as we learn to really walk with God and reflect Him in our lives.

the second thing is your good deeds, what you do, so there's a thing you don't do, there's something you do do, there's an active element. it's an active element that as a community we are doing and as individuals we are doing.

So the question is, can people see that? Can people see that? Both in your life, but also, can they see the Christian community living out these lives together, loving one another, caring for one another in the world?

[23 : 38] Can they see that? Can they see how many non-Christians are connected in with your community groups? How many of them see your life together? We would be an advertisement for God.

One implication of this is that mission, as we're talking about here, is not an add-on to life. Sometimes, and I'm guilty of this, we can think mission is some event that we just hold or we've just done an outreach.

But actually, what he's saying is, we are all missionaries in whatever context, in whatever relationships you're part of. We're all missionaries. So we can't just separate and say, okay, I did my community service last week.

Some of us went down to St. Barnabas on Saturday. We had a great time. That's a homeless and elderly outreach. Had a fantastic time. And it's great just to see how people were inviting even their non-church colleagues to come in and just serve together so they could see our relationships together.

It's fantastic. And I come away and sometimes I think, okay, great, I've done mission now. Now I can live the rest of my life. But I just say, no. Mission is all of your life, your lifestyle, lived out wherever you are in whatever context.

[25 : 02] And that's why we want to be about church planting, multiplying community groups because in our relational networks we want to spread this attractive advertisement of our lives into every nook and cranny of Hong Kong.

Now, you may be thinking that sounds great. But in my life I know that I've tried to live an attractive life to people but people are not interested.

People just say no. And Peter here is actually not naive. What he says is live such good lives, keep your behavior excellent so that in the thing in which they slander you as evildoers, what does that mean?

That means there will be people who do not see the attractiveness of your life.

There will be people who might say you're stupid. And I find this, for me, it's easy to talk about God to people. It's very difficult because people say, okay, you've got God, I've got my iPad, that's cool, great.

[26 : 17] You know, each to their own. But when we talk about Jesus, sometimes it just get a little bit weirder. It feels a little bit more personal. It's suddenly you're a little bit different.

And Peter says, that's okay. You're an alien and you're a stranger in this world. But he says, don't give up. Keep persevering in doing good, in loving people, in praying for people.

There are people here, I know you've been praying for your family members, for your colleagues for a long time. And he says, persevere. Don't give up doing good deeds because one day people will see what you've been trying to tell them all along and they will glorify God in the day that he comes.

One day people will see that he is worth it. So we've looked at our identity, knowing our identity. Who are we? We're a people, not just individuals, we're a people on a mission together who live out this identity as advertisements to show how good God is.

The final thing I want to say is, how do we live out our mission in the day-to-day? Because when you come down to the practicalities of it in the day-to-day, for everybody, it's going to look different.

[27 : 40] How do we live these attractive lives in front of people? For everybody, it's going to look different because you're in different contexts, you have different relationships, you're involved with different gifts, different passions.

So here's just a few things. If you could put the slide up for me. I find this slide helpful. Sometimes I get into a mentality of thinking, I've got to tell everybody everything all at once.

And then it all becomes a project. It's all about getting a message across to people, rather than about really loving people. So here is a helpful, I think, way of approaching and seeing, how do we live lives which attract people and call people into a relationship with God?

And here's a picture of a baseball field. Start off in the places where you are. Meet people in the everyday places you do life, whether that's at your work, whether that's in your family, whether that's at your club, and show hospitality to them.

Show hospitality to them. Have a coffee. Go for lunch. Whatever it is, show them kindness. It's not a tactic to get them in.

[28 : 54] Genuinely show them hospitality. Second thing, invest in the relationship. Ask questions to get to know their story. Begin opening up your life to them and look for avenues just to love them and serve them.

Ask questions about their kids. What are their hopes for their kids? What are their dreams for their kids? What are they aiming for in life? Enjoy the friendship.

Seek extended time through similar interests if you've got a hobby. Enjoy it together. Keep asking questions. Continue to love and serve. And the final one, get them around your gospel community, your community groups.

Begin exposing them to the word of God. In all of those things, I think there's three things which can be helpful. One is, we need to be intentional.

In the busyness of life, you need to be intentional about how you live your life. What I mean by that is, do you have two or three people, if you're a believer, who you are trying to actively be a living advertisement to, who you can really show an interest in and love?

[30 : 12] Two or three people that you know their names, you've written them down, you are praying for them regularly. With those two or three people, does your community group know who those two or three, know them by name, who those two or three people are?

That's a great thing to do. Your community group is not just a place to have nice time together. It's actually a place where together, you can encourage one another, pray for one another, help each other walk on.

So be intentional. Be intentional about starting conversations with people. Be intentional about inviting people around for a meal. Be intentional in your life. Second thing, plan.

Plan, put things in your diary. If mission shapes your life, it will be evident in your diary. If mission shapes your life, it will be evident in your diary.

Plan. Plan. For me and Fiona, we plan to have people around once every couple of weeks. You can plan this week. Who is it that I can really reach out to have coffee with?

[31 : 17] Have lunch with one of my colleagues? Plan. Plan. Bless. Third thing, bless. I find when I was in, working in an office, offices can be full of negativity and competitiveness.

To be a light in an office, how are you actively going to say, try and bless people? It could be with words, just encouraging someone, saying, I appreciate what you've done this week.

It could be by taking them out for a meal. There are tons of ways, but bless. Look to bless. Think, who this week could I actively go out and bless? And remember, this is a mission we're on together.

It's a family on missions. So your community group, use your time to really encourage one another in the mission you're on. We will be setting up pod meetings.

What I mean by pod meetings is, at the end of October, there will be a time where if you're in a community group, three or four community groups will come together, and that will be a time where we're going to share the stories about our mission, our life on mission together, where we can pray for each other, where we can encourage each other, where we can see how has God answered our prayers.

[32 : 36] And when we struggle with these things, we can just lift each other up. Each of you, each of us, are at a different stage, and I don't know what your next step is.

But here's the final thing I want to say. If you're not yet a Christ follower, what I want you to do is I want you to observe the lives of the Christians around you.

I want you to observe their lives, and I want you to ask some questions. Is their life matching what they say they believe?

Is their life matching what they say they believe? If you're a Christian at this point, you are probably thinking, oh no. And I genuinely sometimes feel, oh no.

And so what I tend to do is, I know that I've shouted this week at one of my colleagues. I know that I lied, and my friends know about it. I know that I've been stressed this week, and I haven't looked like I'm trusting God with my life.

[33 : 46] And that's often, we feel like a hypocrite, so we feel, I can't share my faith, I can't be open, I can't do these things. But we've forgotten who we are. Peter says, once you had not received mercy, but now you've received mercy.

What he means is, God didn't choose a people who got it sorted. He chooses the people who are messed up and broken. He chooses the people who fail.

But the thing is, when we fail, we come back to his mercy, and realize that it's only because God is so amazingly merciful, that I can go, and that his mercy is changing me.

His mercy transformed me, and it pushes me out now into the world to say, listen, I messed up. But do you know what? I have a God who is so amazingly merciful, that I don't have to hide.

When I mess up, I can apologize. And I can be honest with people. It gives you great humility to go out and say, God is amazing.

[34 : 55] I'm not. He is good. And we walk on this journey together. In a world where everyone else is living for the mission of making more money, having a comfortable life, God's call for us as his people is, will you make me known?

Will you keep running back to me, relying on my mercy, walking together, and you will know how I change people's lives through it.

Let's pray. Father, when we see the really high standard that you've called us to, it can make us feel crushed sometimes.

It can make us feel like, well, I'm just not good enough. And Lord, I pray for each one of us who feel like that because actually that is the reality.

We're not good enough. But the amazing thing is it's your grace and your mercy which chooses us. It's nothing because of ourselves. I pray, Lord, that you'd help us to shape our lives around the mission you've called us on.

[36 : 12] That we'd really show a genuine concern and care for the people around us. That we would want to proclaim a God who is so gracious, who is so loving, who calls people to come back to relationship with him.

And that that would be what shapes all of our lives together. In your name. Amen. Amen.