

Having a Missional Mindset

a sermon in the series
A Gospel-Oriented, Mission Driven, and Community-Centered Church

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Acts 13:42-49

So when the Jews went out of the synagogue, the Gentiles begged that these words might be preached to them the next Sabbath. 43 Now when the congregation had broken up, many of the Jews and devout proselytes followed Paul and Barnabas, who, speaking to them, persuaded them to continue in the grace of God. 44 On the next Sabbath almost the whole city came together to hear the word of God. 45 But when the Jews saw the multitudes, they were filled with envy; and contradicting and blaspheming, they opposed the things spoken by Paul. 46 Then Paul and Barnabas grew bold and said, "It was necessary that the word of God should be spoken to you first; but since you reject it, and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life, behold, we turn to the Gentiles. 47 For so the Lord has commanded us: 'I have set you as a light to the Gentiles, That you should be for salvation to the ends of the earth.'" 48 Now when the Gentiles heard this, they were glad and glorified the word of the Lord. And as many as had been appointed to eternal life believed. 49 And the word of the Lord was being spread throughout all the region.

I want you to focus primarily on verse 47. This is the thrust of the message today.

For so the Lord has commanded us: 'I have set you as a light to the Gentiles, That you should be for salvation to the ends of the earth.'"

This is Paul and Barnabas's first missionary journey and they have entered into a city called Antioch of Pisidia. This is not the Antioch from which they were commissioned and sent, it's a different city under the same name in the region of Asia Minor, present day Turkey. As was the custom of Paul and Barnabas they entered into the Jewish synagogue and there they preached several weeks and many people were converted. Along with Jews being converted, Gentiles were also being saved.

On a particular day it seemed as if a whole city had come out to hear these two men proclaim the Gospel of Jesus Christ. If it wasn't the whole city, it was close, as Luke records. The religious leaders were moved with jealousy and envy at the sight. They had labored and worked there a long time and they had never had such a gathering where almost the entire city wanted to hear what they had to say. But here was this itinerant preacher who wasn't even handsome or attractive. Secular extra-biblical historians tell us that the Apostle Paul measured about 4' 11" in height, with an excessively large head, bulging eyes, and a stooped posture. This little Jew was preaching

about the Messiah and the whole city wanted to hear it. With rage, the religious leaders resisted the Apostle Paul, who told them since they hadn't found themselves worthy to inherit eternal life they would turn to the Gentiles.

This was the strategy of God. They were to go into the city and preach to the Jews first because they are His covenant people, but since the Jews rejected the covenant Messiah, Paul and Barnabas would then turn and be a light to the Gentiles.

'I have set you as a light to the Gentiles, That you should be for salvation to the ends of the earth.'"

This is God's strategy then and now. This was not just for Paul and Barnabas. We know this because the Apostle Paul did not reach the entire ends of the earth during his life or ministry. He certainly tried, but there were many more people groups and nations to reach when he was martyred in the city of Rome. We know this command is not just for Paul and Barnabas but for all God's people. You and I are called to be light to the Gentiles, a light to this very world, so that to the ends of the earth the Gospel message will go. This is the mission. Remember: God sends. We go.

This is the mission of Christ. We are the instrument, the church of Jesus Christ, the literal bodily representative of Christ on this earth, and since Jesus is still on mission we are too. Jesus is still about the business of glorifying His Father here on this earth. But since He's not Himself bodily on this earth, He does it through His spiritual body, you and me.

Notice the result of this announcement from Paul in verse 48.

Now when the Gentiles heard this, they were glad and glorified the word of the Lord. And as many as had been appointed to eternal life believed.

Many people came to the Lord Jesus Christ. "As many as had been appointed." What does this mean? It means exactly what it says. It says God has a number that no man can quantify that He has chosen before the foundation of the world to be given eternal life. This is a mystery to you and I, and so many people wrangle and argue over it. It's not given to us to wrangle or argue or divide over, it's simply a fact of His sovereign grace. Jesus said the Father has a certain number and He has given them to Him and if any of that number comes to Him, He will in no wise cast out.

The Bible says you and I have been adopted before the foundation of the world to be His sons and daughters. We are His people appointed to eternal life. The Bible says as a result of Paul and Barnabas preaching, all of those in that region who were appointed to eternal life, came to the saving knowledge of Jesus Christ.

We do know that not all men are going to be saved. This is a fact no one would quibble or argue about. We know this. "Many are called and few are chosen." Jesus said, "Enter by the narrow gate; for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go

in by it. Because narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it.” Our Lord tells us there will be people who will not be saved in the very end.

How are those who are saved, saved? How do they come to God? Are they just exceptional people? Is that the solution? That can't be the answer.

The Bible says it's for the ungodly Christ died. You look among the number and ranks of the redeemed and you will find those who have been the vilest, repulsive, most wicked people. You think of any crime a human can commit and people who are now redeemed have committed it. Murders, child molesters, homosexuals, adulterers, hypocrites; every kind of sin, every kind of person. In fact, when you look at the redeemed and try to sociologically categorize them, you can't do it. There's no rhyme or reason because you have the very poor as well as the very rich. You have people of every ethnicity and we pray that in our lifetime every tongue and tribe will come to know Jesus Christ. This is the mission. May we be the generation that sees it accomplished.

You also see the very educated to the non-educated among the redeemed. You see people of different political stripes. You see the very wealthy and the very poor. You cannot find a sociological pattern. There are no exceptions. God saves whom He has appointed and none of us would be saved had God not first intervened and interposed His Son's blood. We owe our salvation to Him entirely. “Salvation belongs to the Lord,” Jonah said.

The result doesn't stop with verse 48. Look at verse 49.

And the word of the Lord was being spread throughout all the region.

There it is. There, my dear friends, is the mission in action. How was this word spread? Was it Paul and Barnabas going through every region and city and village and town after another so the word of the Lord was spread? No. This is happening while Paul and Barnabas are in the city of Antioch. There's only one plausible answer and that is that the saints of God, as they were converted, were sharing the message. The non-clergy were sharing the Gospel, one neighbor to another neighbor, one coworker to another coworker, one family member to another family member. This is God's strategy and He hasn't changed or modified it; it doesn't need improvement.

You and I are the instruments of His mission. God sends, we go. A kingdom mentality believes the goal of God's redemption does not end with members of the local church but it includes these members going into the world. “For God so loved the world . . .” God sends, we go. This is God's strategy. This is God's methodology.

This is more important to God than whether you get a new TV or what kind of smart phone you acquire. May I be so bold to say this is more important to God than your health? Why do I say that? Because this mission of God takes into consideration every factor of your life. Every consideration of your life is somehow a part of this mission, your health, wealth, family, work, church

life—every component of your life is an instrument and component of God’s overall strategy of you personally being on mission. Thus, your finances, health, relationships, and education, whether wonderful or not, are all a part of God commissioning and sending you to finish His mission of going into the world and making disciples. Those who were appointed to eternal life were saved.

Every consideration of your life is to be a part of the mission. Everything should be measured by the mission. You are to judge all of your life by this mission to glorify God by making disciples. You must evaluate everything by this question, does *this* help me fulfill the mission or discourage or hinder me from doing so? Everything is to be measured by this. Herein is where we come to a great hindrance. We don’t think this way. I would be remiss if I didn’t say that the church, especially here in America, has been plagued with an entirely wrong psychology about the church and its mission.

I. A Wrong Psychology

This is not true in every place in the world. There are other places where the church is quite thriving. Though it may be persecuted, imprisoned, and being martyred on a record scale, the life of the church is quite healthy and effectual for the kingdom of God. Here in this nation we have adopted a wrong mindset about what the church is and what she does.

For more than a year we’ve been trying to redefine what the church is based on what the New Testament says. It is not defined by a location or an event. Church is not Sunday morning at 2945 Oaks Road. That’s not what church is and it’s not a good description of church life. But for most of us, that’s the psychology we have. For so many years we have thought wrongly of the church that we now do not understand what her mission is. We’ve allowed tradition and the precepts, principles, and programs of men cloud our judgment on what the church is and what her mission is.

Given enough time, man will mess a good thing up. Even Christian men. This is a time we need to be asking the kind of questions that were asked of Jesus. Here was this religious system in place and it worked, for them at least. But then came this radical Rabbi from Nazareth, doing and saying things that were off the charts. They couldn’t find answers in their commentaries so they asked, “Why do Your disciples not wash their hands before they eat? Why do the disciples of John the Baptist and the Pharisees fast but Your disciples don’t fast?” Jesus explained that because of their traditions they nullified the commands of God.

This is very important:

A. To Be Missional is a Way of Life Not a Program.

When we program church we steal the life of God from that church. To be missional, is to be on mission, to be about the Father’s business of reaching those who are appointed unto eternal life. And that is not an activity, it’s a way of life. It’s not something you program; yet we have pro-

grammed the life of the church until we define church by the activities we do. We compartmentalize church life and because of this wrong psychology the church is left weaker.

Let me give you an example. We've compartmentalized the church and its ministry by reserving "professional" ministry for a select few. Do you know there are still churches even in this area that believe only the pastor can make hospital visits? Some believe only the pastor can do evangelism, which to them means going door-to-door. "That's what we pay him to do," they say. Then we compartmentalize missions and we send people across cultures to foreign lands and say, "Those are the people who are doing the work of missions." With each compartmentalization of the work of ministry we erode our own responsibility.

How did we get into this shape? It is what we've introduced people to when they become Christians. They come into this kind of programmed, scheduled, systemized church environment that Jesus did not intend.

Nowadays to be converted means to be converted to a church culture and system and they don't know any better. The new Christian doesn't know enough to ask the right questions, he or she don't know the Word of God enough to challenge that, so the new convert innocently accept what the leaders say, which is what the leaders had done in the previous generation when they were first believers. We can go back generation after generation and see that we have bred this concept of church as being something we program.

For example, all you really need to do, if you're a decent writer and want to get decent traction with a book is title it something like this, "Seven steps to financial success," "10 steps to weight loss," "Five steps to raising good kids..." and the book is almost guaranteed success. This is the way we think. Man wants to program and systematize everything. We believe if we could find the right system or program with the right principles and steps, that everyone can duplicate, then that's the way to go. We've brought that into the church. Friends, you cannot program the life of God. The Holy Spirit does not submit to your seven simple steps.

We have eroded what real church life is all about and our responsibility to be on mission. Sadly, church life is really not about life but is more about activity. This is the wrong perception that dominates—still to this day—most of our thinking. I can continue to preach these messages week after week for another year and there will still be innately in you this tendency to go back to a program. That's the way we are. That's our mindset.

A couple from New York City had driven several hours across winding back roads and narrow country lanes, overjoyed to have escaped the hectic pace of city life for a while. They were delighted when they found themselves in a very small town with only a few houses, a post office, and a general store. They spoke to the store owner as they entered, "The country is so nice and quiet," they said. "It's so much better than life in the city. Don't you agree?" The storeowner shrugged his shoulders and said, "I can't really say. I've never lived in the country—all my life I've lived right here in town."

He saw himself as a townsman, not out in the country. He couldn't see the forest for the trees, and often we cannot see the mission God has given us because we have loaded it down with our traditions and systems of what a church ought to be. We need a paradigm shift, a new psychology, a new way of thinking. That's what we've been trying to establish in this series.

II. A Needed Paradigm Shift

A. To Restore Life to the Church a Paradigm Shift is Needed.

What does that shift look like? That's what I'm going to deal with in our remaining time. Next week, Lord willing, we're going to actually lay out some specific things that need to be addressed in our thinking. But I want to deal in a broader way today.

B. A Glimpse at the Missional Mindset.

What does it mean to think with a missional mindset.

First off, we must broaden our focus from an exclusive internal perspective to an inclusive external perspective. In other words, we must think that church is about the sheep—the sheep inside of the church and those lost outside of the church. For too many, the church is all about Christians. In fact, we say the church is for the saved. That is true. But it's not altogether true. It's not the full complete answer. There are people who literally believe and build their whole theology of church life exclusively on the church. It's all about the church, the saved, it's only for the members. It's true, you can only be a member of the church through salvation, being a Christian. Absolutely. But that's not the only focus of church life.

Then there are those who say church life is all about reaching people outside the church. *Don't worry about the church members—they're saved. They're on their way to heaven. They're secure. The focus should be on those outside of the church. Discipleship? Come on. How can you be concerned bottling babies and changing their spiritual diapers if there is lost people out there?* Their whole focus of church is totally on mission and evangelism. Which is right? I say the New Testament doesn't pit these two against themselves. It's both. The church is for the sheep—the sheep found and the sheep lost. This is what our text is saying. As many as were appointed to eternal life were saved, meaning they believed. They were the lost sheep that had to be brought into the fold. This church is not just about you and me, it's about all who have been appointed to eternal life, the field is white unto the harvest ready to be picked and brought in.

If our mentality is focused on the membership and what we can do to build up one another *only* then our definition of the church is inadequate. If mindset is all about reaching lost people and once they're saved we no longer pay attention to them, we don't disciple them, we don't make disciples—which means learners—of Jesus, then we have not fulfilled the mission. Listen to Jesus.

I am the good shepherd; and I know My sheep, and am known by My own. 15 As the Father knows Me, even so I know the Father; and I lay down My life for the sheep. 16 And other sheep I have which are not of this fold; them also I must bring, and they will hear My voice; and there will be one flock and one shepherd. (John 10:14-16)

There it is. The mission is from Jesus. Our job is to care for the sheep within and to be searching for the sheep without. Notice who Jesus is speaking to in this text. He's speaking to the religious leaders. He says He will lay down His life for His sheep but they're not His sheep because they didn't believe in Him. That's a startling statement by Jesus. You would think He would want everybody on board but He clearly delineated that not all are appointed to eternal life. Here were people who were not His sheep and He was not going to lay down His life for them, He was going to lay down His life for His sheep. But there were other sheep outside of that fold, in this case He's talking about the ethnicity of the Jews, He had to bring into the fold, meaning Gentiles.

Did Jesus accomplish that in His life and ministry here on this earth? No. When Jesus left He had a predominantly Jewish church and it was not large at that. Jesus didn't bring all the sheep in, so how are they to be brought in? Through you and I. Christ is still on mission. He is still bringing the lost sheep in through us; we are His body.

In John 16 you'll discover that Jesus said He would go away but He would give them another Comforter and when the Holy Spirit came He would convince the world of sin, righteousness, and judgment. How does the Holy Spirit do that? Wrongly we have said, "Well, He'll go to this person and that person personally and address them and convince them of sin, righteousness, and judgment." No, not at all. Jesus said. "I'm going to give *you* the Comforter and when the Comforter comes to *you* He will convince the world." Jesus is saying the ministry of the Holy Spirit to convince the world of sin, righteousness, and judgment, is through the church. The Spirit of God is active in the world through you—the body of Jesus Christ. Therefore we go. God sends, we go.

Therefore we need to focus not only on the sheep within but the sheep without. We need to have this kind of thinking. The church, as we said last week, is for the world and God's activity in the church is primarily for His mission to reach lost sheep yet to be found.

Secondly, for a mission mindset, we need to change our focus from a church emphasis to a kingdom emphasis.

A missionally minded Christian is one who does not think only in terms of the local church, but in terms of the kingdom.

The kingdom of God is not just a future reality; it's a present reality. Jesus came to usher in the kingdom of God among men. It's here. He's done that. In a geopolitical sense, no, it's not yet, therefore we pray, "Thy kingdom come," but the kingdom of God is right here, right now, and the church is not that kingdom. The church is part of that kingdom but it's not the kingdom in its entirety. Here is one of the problems that has plagued us for decades, maybe even centuries.

So much of the time the church is seen as the totality of the kingdom of God. We have in place a mindset that the church and the kingdom of God are synonymous. But they are not.

When you have a mentality that the kingdom of God and the church of God are the same you have elevated the church above and beyond its importance or priority. As a result, church activity becomes the expression of spirituality. The more people are involved with the church the more spiritual they are because they're involved in the activity of the "kingdom." So what do you think is the greatest activity a Christian can do that displays his spirituality? For most people it's attending church. "I'm attending church. I'm coming to the kingdom. I'm going to worship with other members of the kingdom. This is what we're supposed to do. This is our commitment. If I'm committed to coming to church then I have to be spiritual, I have to be accepted, I have to be right and holy." By church attendance people are either deemed spiritual or unspiritual.

But it doesn't end with attendance. If you want to grow in spirituality you need to go deeper into the activity of the church. You need to get into some kind of position, teach a Sunday school class, be a deacon, because the more involved you are in the program and schedule of the local church, the more spiritual you are considered. This, my friends, is a malady, a plague upon us. This is not Scriptural. This is not the kingdom of God.

What has happened is Christianity has become synonymous with church activity. No wonder lost people don't want to be involved in the kingdom of God or Christianity. They hate everything church is about. It's torturous for a lost person to sit here for two hours. It's difficult for some saved people! Can you imagine how difficult this would be if you didn't have a regenerate heart? There is no earthly or human reason for them to be here.

What does our evangelism look like? Most of our evangelism looks like this, "Hey, come to church with me this coming Sunday." That's it. And we think we're witnessing. Ah, we are witnessing, but our testimony is not of Christ it's of the church, and it's really not the church but to a program or activity of the church. Do you see the danger? Therefore, evangelism, more or less, is seen as a conversion to the church system. It may be different, but every church has a system, a routine, a schedule, a program. We have one. We try not to have one but you can't have organization and order without some kind of structure. As we bring new people in as they get saved they're going to learn the system. What we must labor to do is make sure they understand this is not the kingdom, this is a worship service. This is just one of the things the church does and it may not be the most important thing it does.

If you say, "Oh, the pastor finally preached a message I can agree with. He said I don't have to come to church to be spiritual." Let me address that. We are to care for the sheep not just outside of this body but for those within. I say this as loving as I possibly can, which may not be much to some, but we've covenanted to gather at certain times during the week because we need to be together. Unfortunately, the way we gather is not ideal for church life and we've addressed that and will continue trying to address that with the missional communities that will be formed in January. But even this time, which I think is one of the least profitable times of the entire week, is important.

I didn't say it was entirely unprofitable, it is profitable, but involvement at the building is not the priority of our Lord. Wherever a believer is, there is the church. Church is not something outside of ourselves; it is what we are. You are the church. Oak Grove Baptist Church exists wherever you are. If you are at work, there is the church of Oak Grove. If you're at the plant, there's the church. If you're at the bank, there's the church. If you're making a service call, there's the church. If you're at school, there's the church. You are the church of the Living God. Start acting like it. Start believing what God has called you to be.

Unfortunately, we have so saddled the church with a structure that will not let the church be the church and the life of Jesus Christ cannot flow. It's restricted and hindered, if not altogether hindered.

The famous English preacher John Stott said there are many structures the church has that keeps it from doing what God called it to do. He said it's rebellion.

“Our static, inflexible, self-centered structures are heretical structures because they embody a heretical doctrine of the church. If our structure has become an end in itself, not a means of saving the world, it is a heretical structure.”

If the way we systematize the Christian life keeps us from having this mission psychology, this mission mindset, then our system is in rebellion against God and His mission. It's that simple. I recognize that we as a church have not been very obedient even in the way we structure ourselves. I've confessed that to you numerous times and I continue to lament it. Thank God that with His help we are transitioning away from that. But don't misunderstand. Bringing in a new structure is not the answer. Meeting together in smaller groups and homes is not the answer. If you look to that structure to be the means of the Christian life you are going to be sadly disappointed.

The structure is only to aid, to facilitate, not to be the whole purpose. You've got to be the church when you get together. The life of Christ must come out of you, which means you being real.

What is the mission today? It's simple. The mission is to invest our lives in others so they can be like Jesus. Therefore real spirituality is the result of our investment into other people. Real spirituality is loving Jesus so much that you adopt His ways because you love Him. His way is to glorify the Father in such a way as to bring lost people in.

Thirdly, we must cease to think of ministry as reserved to the clergy.

A missional mindset does not think of the ordained minister as the only one given ministry responsibilities. The person with a missional mindset sees himself or herself as an equal minister of Jesus Christ. I understand why we ordain, I understand ordination certificates and why we do all of that, there is some value to that perhaps, but very little. I think the repercussions and results of it have been more negative than positive. We send a signal to everyone else that

unless you get this piece of paper and you're specifically ordained for ministry, then somehow you're not quite qualified. That has been the unintended consequences and looks at how weak, paltry, and powerless we are because we are looking to a select few to do the work of the ministry. Absolutely wrong.

Ed Stezer, Christian missiologist and Executive Director of LifeWay Research, has written, "My fear is that we have created a class system in the body of Christ comprised of the 'called' and the 'not so much called.'"

The worst thing that could happen to me when trying to witness for Jesus is for the person I'm talking with to find out I'm a pastor. Immediately walls are built up so fast I cannot climb over them or tear them down. They shut me off. But not you. They may shut you down because you're a Christian, but I'm telling you the opportunity for you, a non-ordained by men minister, is a greater opportunity to reach lost people.

Several years ago 750 laymen who were not Christians were asked this question, "If you wanted to talk to someone about spiritual matters, who would you want to talk to: a member of your family, a clergyman, an evangelist, or a layman in the same business you're in?" Ninety-one percent replied, "A layman in the same kind of business I'm in." I hate the term *laymen* or *layperson* but you, as an unordained by men "official" minister of Jesus Christ, have an opportunity. If you live in such a way that they see you are just like them and yet not so much like them the opportunities that would be before you—wow. Many of you have experienced this. You know what I'm telling you is true. If there was a person in your particular business wanted to have some help with spiritual problems, would they recognize you as a fellow layman who somehow might have an answer to the problems they face? Would they recognize you by the way you live and what you talk about and how you respond to life? We're not talking about church activity, we're talking about your life. This isn't about a tract. Are you the kind of person who talks differently, thinks differently, lives differently so they know they could come to you? Oh the opportunity.

This is how a mission minded person thinks. This is the sum total of his life. He thinks about redemption, the redemption of others. This is what we see in our text as people are coming to Christ. Do you know what that early church has that we don't have? For the first 20 or 30 years they had a culture that was unencumbered, unhindered by man's traditions. It started about 25 or 30 years after the church began, but for those first few years they didn't know what they were doing. There was no system, there was no seven steps, they just lived life, every day life in the power of the Spirit with a burden to reach the lost sheep.

I've used this illustration so many times I'm sure you're tired of it and it's lost its effectiveness but if I was to lay out 100 empty paint cans, turned them upside down and put a \$100 bill under one of them, maybe \$500 under one—some of you need more motivation—and I said, "I'm going to count to 10 and set you all loose. Whoever finds the paint can with the money, it's yours to keep." What would happen? You would all run up here and start kicking over paint cans, turning them over as fast as you could. Listen, the text is telling us God has appointed

people unto eternal life. They are already white unto the harvest, they just need somebody to believe that and pursue them their way, not our way. You can reach them naturally, in your everyday life, as you look with radars and antennas peaked, ready to find that person in your world right now that God has appointed.

I will end with this. Let it sink into you.

Neil Cole writes, "Ultimately each church will be evaluated by only one thing. Its disciples! Your church is only as good as its disciples. It does not matter how good your praise, preaching, programs or property are. If your disciples are passive, needy, consumerist, and not moving in the direction of radical obedience, your church is not good."

Let that be what we leave with here today. Amen.