

BACK TO THE BASICS: MISSION

INTRODUCTION

The course *Christianity Explored* works through Mark's firsthand account of Jesus' life and ministry, seeking to answer the question, "One life...what's it all about?" That's a good question, and it is what we attempt to answer in this session.

We want to get into the mind of the Creator, and discover why He created in the first place, and what He's up to now that His creation is broken. As believers, as disciples of Jesus, we are those who both have been created and are being re-created by God. What is His mission for us now as "new creatures"? That's what we seek to answer now—"one life...what's it all about"?

Illustration: Can you guess which companies have the following mission statements?

- Our mission is to "be our customers' favorite place and way to eat." – McDonalds
- Our mission is to "save people money so they can live better." – Walmart
- Our mission is "to be the worldwide authority on kids, families and fun." – Toys 'R' Us
- Our mission is "to deliver family fun and create fond memories for all of our guests." – Six Flags
- Our mission is "to be earth's most customer centric company; to build a place where people can come to find and discover anything they might want to buy online." – Amazon.com

It is important for every company to know its mission statement. A mission statement helps a company stay on point, evaluate its efforts, assess its productivity, and market their uniqueness.

For these same reasons, every Christian should know his mission statement. We're not going to look at any one text, but hopefully you'll see from the numerous passages we consider, that the mission statement we'll formulate is indeed the mission statement given by Jesus to His people in His Word.

DISCOVERING OUR MISSION

Question: What is our mission in life? → That is, why were we created? What is our purpose? Why are we here?

Answer: To glorify God; to bring God glory (i.e., exalt, honor, fear, worship, magnify, bless, adorn, thank, etc.) — to live God-centered lives that reflect His uniquely glorious reputation (Exodus 15:11; Colossians 1:16; Romans 11:36; 1 Peter 2:9; 1 Corinthians 10:31)!

- Exalt God: I must elevate God's status in the minds of others (Psalm 57:5, 11).
- Honor God: I must cause God to have weight in people's values (Malachi 1:6; cf. Psalm 29:1-2).
- Fear God: I must maintain a humble awe of God (Psalm 89:7).
- Worship God: I must proclaim God's intrinsic worth (Psalm 29:2).
- Magnify God: I must make God big in the sight of others (Psalm 34:3).
- Bless God: I must speak well of God (Psalm 34:1).
- Adorn God: I must make God and His gospel attractive (Titus 2:10).
- Thank God: I must express thankfulness for His benefits (Psalm 100:1-5; cf. Psalm 103:1-2).

This is the very goal/mission of God.

- *Psalm 29:1-2* – "Give unto the Lord, O ye mighty, Give unto the Lord glory and strength. Give unto the Lord the glory due unto his name; Worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness."
- *Psalm 96:7-9* – "Give unto the Lord, O ye kindreds of the people, Give unto the Lord glory and strength. Give unto the Lord the glory due unto his name: bring an offering, and come into his courts. O worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness: Fear before him, all the earth."
- *Isaiah 42:8* – "I am the Lord: that is my name: And my glory will I not give to another, Neither my praise to graven images."
- *Isaiah 48:11* – "For mine own sake, even for mine own sake, will I do it: For how should my name be polluted? And I will not give my glory unto another."

- *John 17:1-6* – “These words spake Jesus and lifted up his eyes to heaven and said, ‘Father, the hour is come; glorify thy Son, that thy Son also may glorify thee: As thou hast given him power over all flesh, that he should give eternal life to as many as thou hast given him. And this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent. I have glorified thee on the earth: I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do. And now, O Father, glorify thou me with thine own self with the glory which I had with thee before the world was.”
- *1 Peter 4:11* – “If any man speak, let him speak as the oracles of God; if any man minister, let him do it as of the ability which God giveth: that God in all things may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom be praise and dominion for ever and ever.”
- *Revelation 4:11* – “Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honour and power: for thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are and were created.”
- *Revelation 5:13* – “And every creature which is in heaven, and on the earth, and under the earth, and such as are in the sea, and all that are in them, heard I saying, ‘Blessing, and honour, and glory, and power, be unto him that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb for ever and ever.”

Question: What one thing does God do that brings greater glory to Himself than anything else?

Answer: God was certainly glorified in creation, but His glory is magnified further through salvation.

- *John 1:14* – “And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth.”
- *Romans 9:23* – Partly addressing the problem of evil, Paul writes, “And that He might make known the riches of his glory on the vessels of mercy, which he had afore prepared unto glory.”
- *Romans 11:32-36* – “For God hath concluded them all in unbelief, that he might have mercy upon all. O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out! For who hath known the mind of the Lord? or who hath been his counsellor? Or who hath

first given to him, and it shall be recompensed unto him again? For of him, and through him, and to him, are all things: to whom be glory for ever. Amen.”

- *Ephesians 1:3-14* – The goal of God’s gracious salvation is “to the praise of His glorious grace.”
- *Revelation 5:11* – “And I beheld, and I heard the voice of many angels round about the throne and the beasts and the elders: and the number of them was ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands; Saying with a loud voice, ‘Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing.’ And every creature which is in heaven, and on the earth, and under the earth, and such as are in the sea, and all that are in them, heard I saying, ‘Blessing, and honour, and glory, and power, be unto him that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb for ever and ever.”
- *Revelation 7:9-17* – “After this I beheld, and, lo, a great multitude, which no man could number, of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues, stood before the throne, and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, and palms in their hands; And cried with a loud voice, saying, ‘Salvation to our God which sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb.’ And all the angels stood round about the throne, and about the elders and the four beasts, and fell before the throne on their faces, and worshipped God, Saying, ‘Amen: Blessing, and glory, and wisdom, and thanksgiving, and honour, and power, and might, be unto our God for ever and ever. Amen.’ And one of the elders answered, saying unto me, ‘What are these which are arrayed in white robes? and whence came they?’ And I said unto him, ‘Sir, thou knowest.’ And he said to me, ‘These are they which came out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. Therefore are they before the throne of God, and serve him day and night in his temple: and he that sitteth on the throne shall dwell among them. They shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more; neither shall the sun light on them, nor any heat. For the Lamb which is in the midst of the throne shall feed them, and shall lead them unto living fountains of waters: and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes.”
- God as Savior is His chief manifestation to man throughout Scripture, and the major message God wants to communicate to the world is that He can save (*Isaiah 12:2; Isaiah 43:11; 45:22; Matthew*

1:21; Luke 2:28-30; 3:6 [Isaiah 40:5]; 19:10; John 1:14, 16; 1 Timothy 2:3-4; Titus 1:3-4; 2:10, 13; 3:4, 6).

In fact, apart from God's glorious salvation, I could not actively cooperate with God's mission for me. Being separated from God through the rebellion of my heart and choices (Isaiah 59:2), I would be incapable of bringing glory to His reputation. I would have to be "brought back to God" (1 Peter 3:18) in order to be in a restored position, once again capable of fulfilling my mission (Ephesians 4:1). Now, on the one hand, God still would have received glory from my life (Philippians 2:9-11); on the other hand, reconciliation to God allows me to do it personally, actively, willingly. Thereafter, it stands to reason that the closer I am to (and thus, like) God, the more my life will be a billboard that proclaims His glory. **Bottom line:** God will be most glorified in my life when I am most rightly related to Him through Christ.

Summary: So, what we've learned is (1) that our mission is the very mission of God Himself – to magnify God's glory; and (2) that to do this, we should emphasize the same theme God emphasizes – that is, His salvation/the gospel!

And all God's people said, "Amen," right?! I mean, we know this. We're ambassadors for Christ; we're lights in a dark world; etc.

Wrong: However, what we usually fail to grasp here is that to this point our mission statement is actually incomplete! If we stop here, then churches that just appreciate the gospel and that write about it, sing about it, and preach it are God-pleasing, mission-fulfilling churches ("gospel-centered"). However, I'm going to suggest from Scripture, that God's mission for His "re-created," "new creation" people actually goes beyond that.

Right: Our mission statement isn't complete until it is objectified. We cannot just appreciate God's salvation; we cannot just write about it and proclaim it; we must bring it to bear upon human lives. Our mission statement to magnify God's glory is not on target unless it includes:

- *...BOTH... The subject of our mission – the gospel of God's gracious salvation*

- *...AND... The object of our mission – molding that message into the lives of people*

We call this mission, disciple-making/discipleship (Matthew 28:19-20), and, in a word, this is the mission of the church. And, as we have seen, HOW discipleship happens is that we (1) magnify God's glory (2) by bringing His salvation to bear upon peoples' lives (3) so that they do the same.

Indeed, this is the mission, as the early church understood it (NOT top down, but across the board):

- *Acts*
 - *Acts 1:8; 2:42; 4:29; 8:1-4; 11:26; 15:35* — PEOPLE: Lay people were engaged in turning the world upside down: "daily," "devoted," "continued."
 - *Acts 20:20* — LEADERS: Paul, as a pastor, did not just preach "the whole counsel of God" (v. 27)...He showed and taught "from house to house" (v. 20).
- *Ephesians 4:11ff*
 - LEADERS & PEOPLE: Pastors train others for "the work of the ministry" so growth occurs into the full measure of Christ.
- *Colossians* –
 - Colossians 1:28-29 — LEADERS: "Reach the reachable / teach the teachable"? Yes (per Jesus' model), BUT..."suffer and strive to present every person perfect in Christ" (cf. 1:24-2:4)
 - Colossians 3:16 — PEOPLE: The entire church ("you" is pl.) is called to "warn/teach" one another in order to cultivate the Jesus-wrapped likeness of Colossians 3:1-4:7.
- *2 Corinthians 5:17-21*
 - LEADERS & PEOPLE: from *reconciled* to reconciling

- *Ephesians 4:29/Hebrews 3:13/Hebrews 10:24-25*
 - LEADERS & PEOPLE: We should “minister grace” (wow!) “daily” (recurring word) because sin’s deceitfulness and potential to harden (for all of us) is “daily.” “Spurring each other to love and good works” cannot happen by listening to preaching in the pew.
- RESULT! 2 *Timothy 3:14* — A robust Word-ministry was built upon a robust relational ministry, NOT just preaching/teaching, but “pressing” truth into people’s lives through intentional time with them. An effective Word-ministry is directly tied to an intentional relational-ministry—when people “know” who they are learning truth from, they will respond to it more readily. You can’t do this with everyone, but you can with some (i.e., “Timothy”).

“More Christians bring greater glory to God; better Christians bring greater glory to God” (James MacDonald).

APPLYING OUR MISSION

Conclusions:

- Our mission is God-centered, others-focused, and Word-driven.
 - *God-centered* — thus, if you’re Christian experience is devoid of daily worship/communion/faith/etc., you’re not fulfilling your mission
 - *Others-focused* — thus, if you’re [1] pursuing personal sanctification alone, or [2] not helping others in their sanctification, you’re not fulfilling your mission
 - *Word-driven* — thus, if your interaction with God’s Word is anemic, you’re not fulfilling your mission
- Our mission is cosmic, in league with the God of heaven against the armies of hell.
- Our mission is victorious, guaranteed through the King Himself who became the missionary.
- Our mission is grace & truth—we must be gracious (love people) and know truth (study God’s Word).

- Our mission is simple (not easy); it’s not complicated – it’s simply knowing this Book, living it personally, and pressing it into the lives of those around you.
- Our mission is very hands-on; it’s life-touching-life, daily ministry. This means it may be messy, tiring, inconvenient.
- Our mission is never complete, because people never stop needing God’s gracious truth! “Details have an end/due date; discipleship doesn’t.” Paul spoke of the burdensome “care of all the churches”—I think Paul thought of names/faces differently than we do!
- Our mission is not a Sunday/Wednesday deal; it goes beyond faithfulness to church services. It goes beyond mere preaching and pulpit ministry.
- Our mission commands our entire week—every interaction, every appointment, every response, etc. Our calendar, agenda, priorities, goals, etc. must be informed by this mission. “Life is ministry, ministry is people, people take time.” “Rest is promised, but it is not now.”
- Our mission demands that we evaluate and adjust our efforts. Am I really connecting with people?

The goal of a discussion like this is not to fill your calendar, but to inform your mindset and worldview. The Lord will fill your calendar with just the right people-appointments, for He is the Master of those profitable divine appointments. God simply wants His people to be ready, “taking advantage of every moment” (Ephesians 5:16; Colossians 1:5).

Concerns/Responses:

- *Concern*: “We live in a fast-paced American society compared to the early church; our lives are so much busier! That mission sounds like it takes some effort!”
- *Response*: Yes, it will! But, Hebrews 3-4 reminds the believer that God has promised him rest. But it is not now! Jesus’ expressed His mentality this way, “[Work...for] the night cometh, when no man can work” (John 9:4). Therefore, He considers His people to be “fellow-workers” in 1 Corinthians 3:9, laboring with Him in God’s harvest and building project – God expects us to work for and with Him. The New Testament was not secret about this, and it therefore regularly uses terms

like “toil,” “labor,” “struggle,” and “strive.” Paul’s mindset with regards to his mission was, “I will very gladly spend and be spent for you” (2 Corinthians 12:15). “Rest is promised, but it is not now.”

- *Concern:* “I’m afraid that I might get burned and/or burned out if I get involved in people’s lives like that.”
- *Response:* Paul was one who knew extreme labor for the church – his list of burdens in 2 Corinthians 6:4-5; 11:23-33 is exhausting (“in afflictions, in necessities, in distresses, in stripes, in imprisonments, in tumults, in labours, in watchings, in fastings”). Nonetheless, he would affirm, “We are troubled on every side, yet not distressed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; cast down, but not destroyed...So then death worketh in us, but life in you...all things are for your sakes, that the abundant grace might through the thanksgiving of many redound to the glory of God. For which cause we faint not; but though our outward man perish, yet the inward man is renewed day by day. For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory” (2 Corinthians 4:8-17). When the mission of God is undertaken in the might of God, we will experience the mercy of God – “the joy of the Lord is our strength” (Nehemiah 8:10).
- *Concern:* “This mission commands more than just Sunday and Wednesday. Really?”
- *Response:* The “daily” language was started by Jesus in Luke 9:23, “If any *man* will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me.” The author of Hebrews encouraged the believers to “exhort one another daily...lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin” (3:13). We need daily discipleship, fellowship, edification, etc. so that we are not hardened and deceived in regards to our mission (cf. Hebrews 10:24-25). This was modeled by the early church in Acts 2, and it was followed by the Lord adding to their number “daily” (2:47; 16:5)!

- *Concern:* “You just sound young and idealistic. Perhaps you should wait until you experience real life.”
- *Response:* That concern is certainly valid, which is why Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 7 that he wished all people might be like himself – free from the responsibilities of spouse and children so that God might be more undistractedly served. Some responsibilities in life do indeed diminish the amount of effort/time that we can put into this mission, but those responsibilities do not negate the mission or our need to engage in it. From Scripture itself, we could indeed preach two different very messages on the topic of singleness: (1) *Why you should stay single and follow Jesus* — enjoy less distractions to minister the gospel (1 Corinthians 7 and Matthew 10); (2) *Why you should get married and follow Jesus* — enjoy a gospel partnership and a gospel-picture (Ephesians 5). Whether single or married, our mission remains the same, and there are many ways in which the young adults singles are better equipped by their situation in life to do that.

I believe that God’s mission can still turn a city upside-down and light a world on fire, but it won’t unless it’s engaged in with the same commitment and unanimity displayed by the early church. Friends, this is your life!

CONCLUSION

Brothers and sisters, we must recognize that we are “slaves” of Jesus Christ.¹

- Titus 1:1 – “Paul, a servant of God, and an apostle of Jesus Christ” (cf. Ro. 1:1; Phil. 1:1).
- James 1:1 – “James, a slave of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ.”
- 2 Peter 1:1 – “Simon Peter, a slave and an apostle of Jesus Christ.”

Their lives were not their own—Christ was their life, so people were their focus. And, what an impact they made!

My, how far we have come from that comprehensive and compelling awareness in our comfortable, convenience, complacent, calloused, formal, programmatic, American Christianity. Friend, your Master has purchased you and calls you to represent Him. He lived in a fishbowl, immersed in real, raw people-ministry (and He loved that!)—the Lord of Glory, known as the Friend of Sinners, eating with them, sharing life with them, touching them, pressing truth into them. Christian, we have a mission—to magnify God’s glory by bringing His salvation to bear upon peoples’ lives. Let’s get active in that mission of discipleship and may it drive us individually and corporately every day of our lives.

Illustration: Consider the following imaginary account provided by S. D. Gordon in his book *Quiet Talks on Service*. He depicts a conversation between Jesus and Gabriel upon Jesus’ ascension and return to heaven.

As the angel Gabriel greets Jesus he asks, “Master, You died for the world, did You not?” to which the Lord replies, “Yes.” “You must have suffered much,” the angel says; and again Jesus answers, “Yes.” “Do they all know that you died for them?” Gabriel continues. “No. Only a few in Palestine know about it so far,” Jesus says. “Well, then, what is Your plan for telling the rest of the world that You shed Your blood for them?” Jesus responds, “Well, I asked Peter and James and John and Andrew and a few others if they would make it the business of their lives to tell others. And then the ones that they tell could tell others, and they in turn could tell still others, and finally it would reach the farthest corner of the earth and all would know the thrill and power of the gospel.” “But suppose Peter fails? And suppose after a while John just doesn’t tell anyone? And what if James and Andrew are ashamed or afraid? Then what?” Gabriel asks. “I have no other plans,” Jesus is said to have answered; “I am counting entirely on them.”²

Jesus’ disciples are Jesus’ plan for reaching the world with His good news of salvation—and as it has been widely noted, He has no Plan B. Disciples of Jesus, we must not drop the ball! If “Christ is your life” (identity), then this is your life (mission).

ENDNOTES

¹ Of this humbling, yet honorable term, William Barclay writes (*The Letters of James and Peter*, rev. ed. [Philadelphia: Westminster, 1976], 293; emphasis in the original):

“(i) To call the Christian the *doulos* of God means that he is *inalienably possessed by God*. In the ancient world a master possessed his slaves in the same sense as he possessed his tools. A servant can change his master; but a slave cannot. The Christian inalienably belongs to God.

(ii) To call the Christian the *doulos* of God means that he is *unqualifiedly at the disposal of God*. In the ancient world the master could do what he liked with his slave. He had the same power over his slave as he had over his inanimate possessions. He had the power of life and death over his slave. The Christian belongs to God, for God to send him where He will, and to do with him what He will. The Christian is the man who has no rights of his own, for all his rights are surrendered to God.

(iii) To call the Christian the *doulos* of God means that the Christian owes an *unquestioning obedience to God*. Ancient law was such that a master’s command was a slave’s only law. Even if a slave was told to do something which actually broke the law, he could not protest, for, as far as he was concerned, his master’s command was the law. In any situation the Christian has but one question to ask: “Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do?” The command of God is his only law.

(iv) To call the Christian the *doulos* of God means that he must be *constantly in the service of God*. In the ancient world the slave had literally no time of his own, no holidays, no time off, no working-hours settled by agreement, no leisure. All his time belonged to the master.”

² Cited in Herbert Lockyer, *All the Apostles of the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1972), p. 31 quoted in *Ibid*.