

MADE FOR A MISSION
Acts 1:7-8

Purpose Driven Life Lenten Series
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These past weeks we have looked at God's purposes for your life. Our first purpose is to know and love God, and that is worship. The second is fellowship, to learn to love each other. The third is discipleship, to learn to become like Christ. And the fourth is ministry, to learn to use my abilities for God in serving him and others.

Now today we come to the fifth purpose which is to share the Good News. Once I know that God made me to love me, and that life has a purpose, God expects me to share that with other people. And the often misunderstood word we use for this is evangelism.

Now some don't like this word because they think of some guy on TV with big hair and a southern accent yelling, "Send me your money!" But that is not what evangelism, or being an evangelist, is about at all. Evangelism is simply the Greek word for sharing the "good news" of Jesus.

So where am I supposed to share it? Acts 1:8 says, *"You will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."* What Jesus was saying to his followers is that you need to start this sharing at home in Jerusalem, with the people around you.

Then go to Judea and Samaria, kind of like the state and country around you. And then he says, "I want you to go to the ends of the earth. I want you to go reach everyone else." And notice that he doesn't say, "You will be my defense attorney, or my salesperson." You don't need to defend God. All he wants you to do is be a witness.

And a witness, my friends, simply tells what has happened to them. You see, you are an expert on your life. Nobody can be a better witness of what God has done in you, than you. God says that he wants you to tell others what Jesus has done in you, and for you. And he says that he wants you to share it with people near, and far, and to the ends of the earth.

But why does he say and command this? Well, God's purpose from the beginning of time is to build a family of people who love him and trust him, and who are going to spend eternity with him. And yet the amazing part is that he's chosen you and me to help complete this mission. In other words, God puts the future of his kingdom in our hands.

I heard this story about God telling an angel in heaven, "My plan is to give the Good News to my children on earth and ask them to share it." But the angel asks God, "What if they don't. What is plan B?" And God says, "There is no plan B." We're it, my friends. You and I have the greatest privilege of sharing the Good News of Jesus with all.

So how do you do God's mission agenda? Well first, to complete my God-given mission, I must share the good news with those in my world. In other words, your mission starts right at home, in your neighborhood, in your community. God wants you to go to family, to friends, to co-workers, to neighbors, and share the good news of Jesus.

Now why are we so reluctant to do this? Well, one reason is because we believe the myth that people aren't interested, or are offended, by spiritual issues. And yet that is not true. Every single poll and survey these days say that Americans are more interested in spiritual things now than they were 10-years ago.

You see, my friends, people are interested in talking about God. Opportunities for sharing the good news are staring you in the face every single day. You just have to be ready for them. We had a young family join my previous church who said that some neighbors invited them to worship, and told them so much about that church, that they just had to come and see.

Now there are literally thousands of ways you can witness and tell others about what God has done for you. And yet the most important part of your witness is if you are alive and passionate in your love and faith in Jesus. Your words and example can be contagious. You need to believe the truth that there are people you know who you can reach better than anyone else. That is because you truly care about them as people.

Just think, my friends, that if someone hadn't shared this message of Jesus with you, you'd be totally lost. If someone hadn't passed this message on to you, you may be in danger of missing out on heaven. So God wants you to pass it on. As long as there's one person on earth who doesn't know the good news, God says we've got to keep reaching out.

Every once in awhile in my ministry people have attempted to analyze me as a person and why I have such a passion for evangelism. Some have said, "Well, Nathan must just want a big church." Some have scoffed at reaching new people and promoted that we should rather turn in on ourselves, focus more on our own needs, likes and dislikes, rather than on meeting the needs of others.

And yet anyone who truly knows me knows my passion, purpose and calling in ministry is to reach those who don't know or have a relationship with Jesus. And this passion has not changed one bit in the past 36 years of being a pastor. Reaching others is a command of Jesus we cannot avoid; we have no other choice.

The reality is that there are churches all around who are not focused completely on God's marching orders for evangelism, and many of them are dying and losing members in droves. The truth is that if we turn our mission in on ourselves, or on nice stories, or on watered down Biblical truth, that won't motivate anyone in mission. And it basically says to the those outside the faith, "You can go to hell."

So the first thing Jesus says is that we are to reach out to those in my world, and the second thing he says is that we need to reach out beyond my world. Love, in other words, demands that I move beyond my comfort zone to people with different backgrounds, education, languages, races, economics. Our mission is of ultimate importance because it has eternal consequences.

Repeatedly in this book, the Bible, we are told to reach out to others, to build bridges and not walls. God expects us to make the first move. In fact, over and over God says it in one word, "Go." I want you to go. You can't spell God, or Good News, or Gospel, without spelling go. I must dare to reach out beyond my world.

Now here at Messiah, fortunately, we have increasing numbers of people who are reaching out beyond themselves. There are many who are reaching out through Stephen Ministry, through TeacHaiti, through the Food Shelf, through support of Luther Crest Bible Camp, through our Community VBS, through our Malaria Project Support, through stepping forward financially to call Charis Bjorklund in her ministry at Messiah with worship, youth and children, etc.

One day, my friends, each one of us, you and me, are going to stand before God and he's going to judge if we learned to love others as he has loved us, or if it was all talk on our part. He's going to do an audit of whether we ever did anything that showed real love to those outside my circle, or did we just say and think that we loved others?

Did we give joyfully and sacrificially from our abundant finances and material blessings, or were we more centered simply on our own comforts and pleasures? Were we so concerned about telling others about Jesus that we were willing to focus our worship, our church programs, our own learning and involvement, on reaching out beyond our own needs?

Will Jesus say to you, as he does in Matthew 25, *"I was hungry and you fed me. I was thirsty and you gave me drink. I was a stranger and you invited me into your home. I was naked and you gave me clothing. I was sick and you cared for me. I was in prison and you visited me."* And if we say, "Jesus, when did we do this he will say, *"When you did it unto the least of these my brothers and sisters, you did it to me."*

So Jesus says that we are to reach out to those in my world, to those beyond my world, and finally to people in the whole world. Jesus said in Mark 16:15, *"Go everywhere in the world and tell the good news to everyone."* Now was Jesus just talking here to pastors and missionaries? No, he calls all his followers to be fishers of men and women.

And today this Great Commission is more possible for us than ever. For in Jesus' time they needed to walk everywhere or take a camel. Today, we can easily travel to Haiti or other mission fields. We have instant communication around the world through internet, e-mail and phones. We have so much more money today that can be given to support mission work. People right here in Hoffman, and all around the world, are hungry for the good news.

So in conclusion, my friends, is anyone going to be in heaven because of you? When you get to heaven, is anyone going to thank you for telling them the good news? It is sobering to think of the millions of people who will die this year who don't know Jesus Christ. Jesus said, "Remember, there is no Plan B, for I have left it up to you to go."

You have heard me say before that the most dangerous prayer you can pray is, "God, please use me." I dare each one of you to say it. Do you have enough courage to pray each day, "God, use my life?" Pray it and watch what happens. For life is so much more meaningful, and filled with joy, when you live it for God's purposes.