

# THE GREATEST STORY EVER TOLD

## [Part 6 – Mission]

We have been attempting to retell the heart of the greatest story ever told.

We've been with Jesus in His prayer of intercession, His arrest, His trials, His crucifixion > We've seen that this Jesus is the Bread of Life, and that He is the resurrected Lord.

Now we come to the end of John's gospel.

In any preaching there are 2 great questions that need an answer:

1. The first is '**What**' > The exegetical question, what is the text saying and what is its meaning?
2. Is the '**So what?**'

And chapter 21 is John's '**so what?**'

There's the glory of our Lord, His coming, who He is, His death, His rising > But '**So What?**'

Well it can be summed up in one word > **Mission.**

The text we can work back from is:

**John 20 : 21**

It can also be found in the prayer of Jesus:

**John 17 : 18**

One of the things we need to grasp about mission is its sheer centrality > As you go through the gospel of John, mission is its theme from the beginning.

The mission of the Son sent into the world by the Father dominates the whole first part of the gospel.

But as that moves towards its climax, we begin to discover that there's another phase of mission > The mission of the church.

When you look into this gospel you find again and again that the Trinity is defined in terms of mission:

- **The Father is the one who sends the Son**
- **The Son is the one who has been sent by the Father**
- **The HS is the one sent by the Son**

So mission defines the very character of God in His Trinity within this gospel.

And John's account is the greatest book on mission ever written > Its pervasive theme is:

**The mission of the Son sent by the Father and out of that, the church sent by the Son in the power of the Spirit.**

The link here is critical > Because the sender continues to be present.

As in the case of Jesus, sent by the Father, it's not that the Father leaves the Son and departs from the scene > Rather the whole mission of Jesus is the mission of the Father in and through Him.

In the same way, the mission of the church, sent into the world by the Son, is the mission of Jesus continued through and in His people, empowered by the HS.

It's not 2 missions, but 1 great mission.

**Matt 28 : 16, 18 – 20**

Often we misrepresent this a little > We make it the comforting presence of Jesus.

But in context **'I am with you'** means **'It is My mission and I'm inviting you to join me'**

Jesus is saying **'Go into all the world and make disciples. I'm going to do it – All authority in heaven and earth is mine – Are you coming with me?'**

That is the nature of mission.

Here is our Lord, risen from the dead, and now He is sending us.

In effect He is saying **'I'm going to the world [the community, the workplace, the school] > There I'm going to work, and I invite you to come and join Me'**.

But with the disciples we find that they have gone fishing:

**John 21 : 1 – 14**

We begin at the Sea of Galilee > 7 of the disciples had gone fishing but had caught nothing.

What are they doing, fishing? Jesus is risen from the dead > What are they up to in Galilee? They should have been in Jerusalem waiting for the Spirit.

Well first of all, as we saw in Matt 28 Jesus had told them to go to Galilee.

Secondly this would have been what the doctor ordered > Just think of the emotional roller-coaster these men had been through in the last few days:

- **Palm Sunday > Hallelujah, hosanna, cheering, everything is great > Jesus is going to be accepted as Messiah.**
- **Then there was the betrayal, arrest, crucifixion and burial.**
- **Followed by the resurrection > He's alive.**

The best thing, psychologically, would for them to be back on familiar ground with a night's fishing.

But they catch nothing and there's this stranger on the shore, and fishermen do not readily take advice, especially from someone on the land.

He's call to them is quite colloquial > **'Hey lads, nothing last night, eh?. Give it another go, on the right hand side'**.

The catch is incredible, they can hardly get it aboard > John, always intuitive, says **'It's the Lord, it's Jesus'**.

They come to land and Jesus has prepared a breakfast for on the beach and they share it together.

Suddenly we begin to get the meaning of all this, because fishing was the term He used to call them first of all > **'Follow Me and I will make you fishers of men'**.

Fishing has been the way they've seen their mission with Jesus up to this point and so here we are moving on to a new phase of it > Jesus is bringing them back to that so that He might re-commission them for what lies ahead.

Now notice the context of this > It's taking place in Galilee.

I don't know what you think about Galilee, but I always thought of it as a sleepy, backwoods town > Where nothing ever happened.

That's where Jesus was brought up, a nice quiet place > But the historians have exploded that myth.

Galilee was place of huge stir and movement, on the edge of one of the great trade routes of the world > And if Josephus' figures are right, the Galilee region was at that time the most densely populated area of the world.

This is where Jesus was moulded, in the midst of a clash of cultures, civilisations, and ideas that swept through the world at that time.

Jesus takes the disciples back to Galilee because His call to them is to the wider world out there beyond Israel.

His other reason for the location is that He brings them back to where it all began > What He is saying is:

**'I called you 3 years ago; now things have changed. You now know what this business of following me is going to cost; you know your own limitations and weaknesses.**

**There's the promise of the Spirit to enable you, but as we enter the next phase I want to know > Are you still with me, as I make my way to the nations and the ends of the earth?**

**Will you now follow me?**

I think that is the whole point of this incident, and that relates to where we are today.

We're all facing new chapters in our lives > The world is facing a new chapter, which is rather threatening > Who knows what the next year will bring?

It's here that Jesus meets **us** and says **'Can I count on you now?'**

He takes us back to that place of earlier commitment > To our personal equivalent of that shoreline in Galilee > To our conversion, to our baptism, or some moment when God met you with His Spirit and you said **'I will give my life to you'**.

Jesus is taking us back to that point and He's saying **'Do you still stand behind that commitment? Are you ready to follow me?'**

Now we come to what following Jesus implies, and what mission is all about:

## **1. Reliance**

That's the whole point of this fishing exercise > There's a stark contrast between fishing undertaken on the basis of the disciples' own experience and fishing under the leadership of Jesus.

On the one hand nothing and on the other an overwhelming catch > And I can't help but draw some parallels to the contrast between mission experienced in the industrialised world and that in the developing world.

The evangelical churches in the west are winning just 1.9 unbelievers to Christ per year > Less than 2 people.

But you go to the third world and what a difference, churches are mushrooming.

**George Hoffman**, the first director of Tearfund, put it very well.

He'd spent a few days with a Christian tribe in a remote part of Uganda > During his first few days with them he was absolutely astonished because these people had nothing.

They had almost no food and yet strangely they always seemed to be able to eat; when they got sick they all prayed and people got healed; there were bandits in the area and yet they always seemed to know how to escape.

After a few days, George came to one of the elders of the tribe and said:

**'I can't understand this. These things don't seem to happen in the West'**

The elder very wisely said to him **'George, in the West you have God and things. Here in Africa we just have God.'**

Now we can't become like that > The toothpaste can't go back into the tube > We have all these technological helps and applications, and we thank God for them; they are helpful.

But the deadly danger is that we trust in them and then we no longer need to trust in God.

The index of how much we trust in God is how much do we pray? We can't evade the challenge of that > If we pray it's because we have to, because we depend on God; but if we don't pray much, we feel we can get by without Him.

When prayer meetings are held in this country a handful of people turn up > When they're held in South Korea 25,000 turn up > Do you see the difference?

How do we measure up?

Do you see what Jesus does with these disciples? He says '**You reach the world**'.

And we think what? This bunch of nobodies?

What else can they do > They fall on their knees and pray and pray and pray > And what happens?

Suddenly there's a sound from heaven like a mighty rushing wind > Yes I know that Pentecost is unique, but the affect of prayer isn't.

Take Acts 4 for example: Here they are gathered together threatened with persecution, and suddenly as they pray the place is shaken.

When did that last happen in our prayer meetings? You see they needed it, they were desperate > The target was so far down the road they had to get close to God.

What about us?

We want to see our children and family come to faith; we want to see lost people come to conversion and join with us in worship of our Saviour > Then we must start to pray and rely on Him, for it is Jesus who knows where the fish are and will show us > If we ask.

## **2. Mission is about Repentance**

### **V 15 – 17**

Peter is being re-commissioned, and there's some stuff that needs to be dealt with.

Jesus is building a fire > But when was the last time Peter warmed himself by a fire?

And then there's the threefold questioning to go with the threefold denial > Peter is being called here to reaffirm his faith and to get that denial out of his life once and for all.

Peter is getting forgiven, and then moving on > And I am anxious that we all should get to that place of being forgiven and moving on.

You see most of us have 2 lists of sins > We've got the A list, the respectable list, the ones we wouldn't mind sharing, they're Christian sins.

We come to the Lord asking forgiveness, and He does, and that's fine, they're all dealt with.

But I think many of us have another list.

A B list buried in our hearts and we would be totally embarrassed for that list to be read out in public > And they are sins that never get dealt with > We keep clearing off the A list, but B lingers on.

Part of the reason is pride > Something inside us is saying '**I never did these things, not me the mature Christian**'.

So we don't face them.

The 2<sup>nd</sup> thing about these sins is that often we don't bring before the Lord because we are embarrassed and we feel that He will be too.

But what we must realise is that we need to come to Christ with these things:

Jesus died for sinners, while we were yet sinners, in all the darkness and the filth > Whatever it was > His blood covers all, it never fails.

By hanging on to these sins we are reducing Jesus > We are saying He's only a bit Saviour > He can deal with A list but not the B list.

And by doing that we are actually dishonouring Him > We need to come to Him as our total Saviour and in His grace let Him deal with the B list things in our lives.

Look at Him on that cross > Isn't it amazing, the wonder of His love for us, doing all that for us; is He not able to forgive all our sins?

Let's take that B list out of the back of our hearts and tear it up in His presence > Throw it away in the depths of His forgiveness.

Peter here is re-commissioned > Jesus doesn't just deal with the negative but He gives us a positive in it's place > Peter is given his role and a ministry back.

As **Peter Snowden** said: **'Forgiveness is the wonder of being trusted again by God in the place where I disgraced Him'**.

And notice: All this was public > It happened around the other disciples > God had a great work for Peter to do publicly, but it won't work if Peter is under the shadow of a guy who denied his master.

Jesus is refurbishing Peter's public image.

And there's a great lesson for us here > We can trust Jesus with our public image.

We can all be sensitive to how we're perceived by others > But in this passage God is saying to us **'Relax'**.

He knows how much publicity, how much affirmation we need > We can trust Him with that.

### **3. Mission is about Responsibility**

What does Jesus say to Peter? > **'Feed my lambs, feed my sheep'**.

Notice they are verbs > But the trouble is we like nouns.

Like **'I am a shepherd'** but Jesus says **'Feed my sheep'**. > We qualify as servants by serving, it's by doing.

Never mind what we are, it's what we do > That's ministry and that's mission.

And we all need to realise that it is Christ's sheep and lambs > We ministers sometimes fall into bad habits **'My church, my people, my congregation'**.

They are never ours > They are His > Peter didn't forget that when he wrote his letter, he said **'Tend the flock of God that is under your care'**

Despite all the difficulties of these sheep, they are still His and not ours > Pastors get a temporary opportunity to be an under-shepherd.

And these lambs and sheep matter to Jesus > So much so that He loved the church and gave Himself for her.

We need to be lovers of the church, lovers of God's people, lovers of those who are yet to become Christ's lambs and sheep > If we are to love Jesus.

#### 4. Mission is about Cost

##### V 18 – 19

2 things here:

##### a. A loss of control

Henry Nouwen said this:

**This world says when you were young you were dependent and could not go where you wanted, but when you are old you will be able to make your own decisions, go your own way and control your own destiny.**

**But Jesus has different vision of maturity. It is the ability and willingness to be led where you would rather not go.**

**Immediately after Peter had been re-commissioned to be a leader of His sheep, Jesus confronts him with the hard truth that the servant leader is the leader who is being led to unknown, undesirable, and painful places.**

**The way of the Christian leader is not the way of upward mobility but of downward mobility, ending on the cross.**

This is echoed by Oswald Chambers:

**I am called to live in relationship to God so that my life produces a longing after God in other lives, not admiration for myself.**

**This is hard but it's true. God is not after perfecting me to be a specimen in His showroom. He is after getting me to the place where He can use me'.**

That's what Jesus is talking about > Loosing control > For He is Lord.

##### b. Part of the cost is the loss of life

Because Jesus is using the term stretching out your hand as a euphemism for crucifixion.

Jesus is prophesying Peter's own crucifixion, his loss off life, his martyrdom > And in our world today this should really resonate with us.

For the past 100 years there have been an average of 68,000 Christian martyrs per year > And it's estimated that 1 in 200 Christians alive in the world today will die as martyrs.

That's the world we are in, but it's the way the Master went > Should not the servant still tread it?

He gave His all for us, and this is following Jesus > That if necessary we will give all for Him.

**Samuel Rutherford** once said:

**God has called us to Christ's side, and the wind is now in His face in this land. And seeing you are with Him, you cannot expect the sheltered or sunny side of the hill.**

## **5. Mission is about Relationships**

### **V 20 – 22**

Peter's got his own future spelled out and he's had a nice time with Jesus > He's back in with the Lord > But what about John?

Bishop **Taylor Smith** wrote in the margin of his Bible next to these verses '**Mind your own business**'

That's exactly what Jesus says > '**What is it to you? You follow Me!**'

Peter's got to come to terms with the fact of diversity in Christian life, in gifting and ministry:

- **Peter would be the preacher, John the faithful writer**
- **Peter would be the shepherd, John the seer**
- **Peter the foundational witness, John would look after Mary, mother of Jesus**
- **Peter would die in the agony of martyrdom, John would live on to a great age and pass away in serenity**

This is the reality of partnership in following Jesus.

There are many others on the road with us, as truly Christ's, as surely commissioned, as deeply loved, as greatly valued > But their calling and gifts are different from ours.

Their convictions on certain matters may not coincide with ours, but we can thank God for them, and at times be inspired and challenged by their example.

In the end, though, the focus must be on Jesus > '**You must follow Me**' He said.

In the final analysis we must take our Christianity from Christ and not other Christians > Other Christians are wonderful, and can be a great help.

But we are to follow Jesus.

## **6. Mission is about Return**

Here is the ultimate parameter of mission:

### **V 22 – 23**

This is where it all leads, this is where it all ends.

**Leslie Newbiggin** says:

**The church is the pilgrim people of God on the move, hastening to the ends of the earth to beseech all people to be reconciled to God, and hastening to the end of time to meet its Lord. Who will gather all into one.**

His return > How we anticipate that Day, when:

- **He who died in shame on that cross and rose gloriously on the 3rd day**
- **He who is with us, the living Lord, through His Spirit right now**
- **Who walks and talks with us through our Christian life and service**

How we anticipate that He will return.

As we look down that long corridor of the future, it is coming closer and closer to the point where He beats on the great doors of time > And the doors swing wide open to admit Him.

And we'll see Him on His throne, crowned Lord of all.

Jesus' prayer back in John 17 will be fulfilled '**I pray that they may see my glory**'.

That makes it all so utterly worthwhile.

Paul tells us:

### **1 Cor 15 : 57 – 58**

Or as **J.B. Phillips** put it:

**Know that nothing you ever do for Him is lost or wasted. It will be worth it all when we see Jesus.**

It will be worth it all when we see that glorious return > But until then we give ourselves to follow Him with:

It will be worth it all when we see that glorious return > But until then we give ourselves to follow Him with:

- **Reliance upon Him**
- **Repentance of our sin**
- **Accepting responsibility for His people**
- **Facing the cost of mission**
- **Engaging in relationships for His sake**
- **And anticipating His return**

In the words of one of our favourite songs:

**I have decided to follow Jesus,  
No turning back, no turning back.  
The world behind me, the cross before me,  
No turning back, no turning back.  
Though none go with me, I still will follow,  
No turning back, no turning back.  
Will you decide now to follow Jesus?  
No turning back, no turning back.**