

The Director of Mission

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[0 : 00] Happy New Year to everyone. It's great to see you all today and I want to just welcome each one of you to this first sermon of our many series on mission.

! As we step into 2025, I want to challenge us as a church to think deeply about what it means to be on mission both individually and as a family of faith.

This afternoon we're going to be considering one area of Christian discipleship that many of us if we're honest struggle with and that's evangelism. Now I realize that when I see the word evangelism, it can stir up different responses in us.

For some of us we might think this isn't my gift. I ain't no Billy Graham. Others of you might be thinking, isn't that why we pay you and Jonathan and David? This is a minister's job.

Other of you might be really honest and you'll say, you know what, I really feel inadequate to the task. I don't really know how to share my faith. And on the flip side, there's some of you who are like, I just love sharing Jesus.

[1 : 06] Whatever your response, I want to be clear from the start. My goal today isn't to guilt chip anyone into evangelism. Evangelism isn't about shaming ourselves into action, nor is it about our personal abilities to change people's hearts.

We also need to remember that we're not responsible for how people respond to the message of Jesus. Instead, my aim is to give you confidence in God's sovereignty.

I want to, I want us all here to walk away trusting in God's ability to save and to transform people as we share the good news of Jesus with others.

Evangelism isn't about us, but it's about God and about his power to transform people through us. If you're here today and you wouldn't call yourself a Christian, perhaps you've made a New Year's resolution to check out church for the first time or to learn more about Christianity.

I want to invite you to consider the incredible gift that God has in store for you this afternoon as we unpack this text. For those of us who like to take notes, I just want to give you my three points.

[2 : 24] The first point we're going to be looking at is God is the one who directs mission as in his divine initiative to reach the world. Secondly, we're going to be looking at God's strategy for mission as in how he intends for his word to be spread throughout the world.

And lastly, God's word is always effective in mission. So let's begin with the first point, God directs mission. In the passage that we've just read, Luke tells us that a great crowd had gathered from all over to hear Jesus speak.

The crowd had different expectations. Some had heard about Jesus healings and some came seeking physical restoration. We know from John's Gospel that after that great miracle of the 5,000, many people just saw Jesus as a meal ticket.

Others were drawn by the rumours of his messianic claims as the long awaited liberator of Israel.

You know, they expected a William Wallace of sorts who would come and overthrow the enemies of Israel, the Roman Empire, and make Israel great again.

As a crowd gathered, you can imagine the buzzing anticipation. People jockeying for a better position to hear and to see what Jesus would say. Would he talk about healing?

[3 : 43] Would he provide more bread? Or would he announce a revolution? As they waited in silence, they would have watched Jesus sit down in the rabbinical teaching position as he prepared to speak.

And Luke tells us that he began to tell them a parable. A sower went out to sow his seed.

Immediately the crowd must have thought, what's going on here?

This isn't what we expected. Now for some of you, you might be scratching your head going, what is a parable? Well, let me tell you.

A parable is a short story or a set of short stories or illustrations that convey spiritual truths through everyday experiences. In this case, Jesus uses an agricultural story, a farming metaphor to explain profound truths about the kingdom of God.

For his audience, farming was familiar territory. They understood the concept of sowing seed. But what Jesus was teaching was far deeper. In Jesus' time, the farming method would have looked strange to us.

[4 : 59] Today, farmers plough the ground first, then sow seed. But in Jesus' day, farmers would sow the seed first, broadcast the seed everywhere, then plough the land afterward.

The seed was scattered and the wind would carry it to different places. As we read, some seed fell on the hard beaten path, others on rocky soil, some among thorns and some on good soil.

But this message in this simple, relatable story was anything but simple.

It was a picture of how the gospel spreads and how people respond in different ways. Indeed, this is where the beauty of the parable lies. Jesus speaks to the heart of the human condition, showing us the way people respond to his message.

Just as a sower scatters seed, the message of the kingdom is spread indiscriminately. And the outcome depends on the condition of the soil.

[6 : 05] That's why Jesus says that interesting little phrase. He who has ears to hear, let him hear.

This phrase is an invitation to listen. Not just with our ears, but with our hearts. To receive what God is saying and to respond to what he's saying.

This is a striking phrase. An invitation not only to hear the word spoken, but to listen and to understand, to see Jesus.

However, when we read the response of Jesus' disciples, we see too that they were confused. If the crowd were confused, the disciples' melons were being squeezed. They immediately asked Jesus, what does this parable mean?

Jesus then explains to them in verse 10. To you is being given to know the secrets of the kingdom of God, but to others, they are in parables. So that seeing they may not see and hearing they may not understand.

[7 : 10] This is a reference or direct quote from Isaiah chapter 6 verse 9, where the prophet Isaiah speaks of how God's message is both the power to reveal truth to those who have spiritual eyes and ears, but also to conceal it from those who are spiritually blind.

The first critical lesson we need to learn about the mission of God is that it's God who directs those who is God who directs who understands his message.

It is God's sovereignty that grants spiritual understanding. For some, the truth of the gospel is unveiled. It's like light breaking through darkness.

But for others, the message is veiled. You hear it, but it doesn't penetrate your hearts. In other words, parables have the ability to reveal and also to conceal.

This was true in Isaiah's day. It was true in Jesus' ministry, and it remains true today. As we share the gospel, some will hear it and receive it, while others will hear it but will not understand.

[8 : 24] For those who are genuinely seeking to know God, you need to know this. God is the one that gives you the ability to hear. In other words, it is God who gives us the faith to believe.

This is what Paul says in his letter to Ephesians. For he says, For it is by grace you have been saved. Through faith. And this is not of yourselves. It is the gift of God.

Not by work so that no one can boast. When a person's heart is receptive to the gospel, it's because the truth of God's word applied by the Holy Spirit has regenerated us.

That is, it has taken a spiritually dead person and brought them alive again. It has transformed us. But on the other hand, those who are dull of hearing, they may hear the message, but it will not penetrate.

They may understand the message intellectually, but it will not transform or change their lives. They may hear the words of the gospel, but they are indeed spiritually dead, as Paul says, dead in their transgressions.

[9 : 37] They cannot understand or respond because they are still under the power of darkness or the power of sin. This reminds me of a story that the late Dr. Martin Lloyd-Jones once told of William Wilberforce, the great abolitionists, bringing his late, his friend, the Prime Minister, William Pitt, to hear the renowned preacher in London, Richard Cecil.

Wilberforce was convinced that as Cecil was preaching one day, that his friend Pitt would be converted here in the sermon. However, after the service, Wilberforce, who had been deeply moved by the sermon on the kingdom of God, eagerly awaited Pitt's response. But as he stepped outside the church, Pitt turned to him and said, I didn't understand a word of what he said. What was that all about?

Both men had heard the same sermon. One was spiritually transformed, while the other find it incomprehensible.

This is the difference between those who have received spiritual understanding through the Holy Spirit and those who have not. A difference many of us here have experienced when the lights of truth, when turned on in our hearts.

[10:56] Once we saw things as confusing, but then we met Jesus through his word. We experienced life, light and joy. So what is the secret of the kingdom that Jesus speaks of?

Jesus reveals that in his explanation in verse 11. The seed is the word of God. Jesus is speaking about the Bible, about God's revelation of himself, his kingdom and his will.

At the heart of the message of the kingdom is the message of the king. The secret of the kingdom is Christ Jesus himself. It's through the power of the word of God that we discover what God is and what he has done for us.

It's through God's word that we come to understand that God is good and we ain't. It's by the word of God that we discover how much God loves us. That whilst we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

And it's by the word of God that we are transformed from darkness to light, from death to life.

Moreover, the word of God is a tool that shapes us.

[12:09] It changes the way we think. It renews our desires. It gives us new values and new ethics that run counter to the world that's around us. And it's by this very same word of God that enables every single Christian to persevere to the very end.

Because our faith is anchored in the truth of the gospel. The kingdom of God is not something that we can earn. It is a gift that we receive from the king.

It is by God's grace that we're able to accept and to understand his message. We cannot earn our way into God's kingdom. There's no amount of intellectual effort or research that will unlock the secrets or the mysteries of God.

It is only through faith, which itself is a gift from God, that we can understand and enter his kingdom. Here's the key lesson for those of us who struggle in evangelism. Do you notice? It's not about the sower's ability to cast the seed.

[13:21] The parable doesn't focus on how clever the sower is or how skilled they are in throwing the seed. Instead, the focus is on the power of the word.

Let me illustrate it with a story. A friend of my wife once shared his testimony in a church. And he described himself as a larger than life character, full of joy in knowing Christ.

But that wasn't always the case. He recalled a time when he was a seven stone heroin addict. One morning, coming off drugs at 6 a.m. in the morning, he happened to turn on the TV and what was playing?

Postman Pat. As he was watching the episode, halfway through the show, the character Reverend Timms paraphrased a quote from the Bible, Matthew chapter 5, verse 45, where it says, The rain falls on the unjust and the just.

Right then and there, this man came to the realization of his own sin that he is unjust. And it hit him like a ton of bricks. And right in front of the TV, he fell on his knees and he cried out to Jesus, save me.

[14:36] One incredible story of the power of God's word to penetrate hearts, even through the most unexpected means. Postman Pat. Isn't that a relief to all of us?

That evangelism is not about our ability to bring about converts, but rather our confidence in the sovereignty of God and the power of his word.

God is the one who directs his mission. It was God's initiative to send his son, the king, to rescue us from sin. And it's God who gives us the ability to understand his message.

We can't intellectualize our way into the kingdom of God. We receive it through faith, which is a gift from God. We're just simply the vessels spreading the seed.

And that leads me to point number two. God's strategy of mission. There's two aspects I want to focus on when it comes to God's strategy of mission. My first sub point is the gospel is for everyone. [15:38] As I've been reflecting on this, the parable of the sower, one thing stands out, and that is the indiscriminate nature of the sowing. The sower doesn't hold back or reserve the seed for a select group.

He scatters it everywhere on the path, on rocky ground, among the thorns and on good soil. This speaks volumes about the heart of God's mission.

The gospel is for everyone. That's the beauty of the gospel. A sower went out to sow, and he had seed in abundance.

This is what we see in the ministry of Jesus. If you've got a Bible there, if you look at the first verse of this chapter, we read that Jesus traveled about from one town and village to another, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom of God.

Jesus could have sung my favorite Johnny Cash song, I've been everywhere man. If you read the gospels, we find out that he was all over Judea, all over Gali, went to Samaria, Tyre and Sidon.

[16:44] That's the beauty of the king. Out of an abundance of love, Jesus comes and scatters the seed, the word of God, which is the power to transform ruined sinners.

And he scatters that word everywhere in abundance. Our king is able to take a dry valley of death, and he makes it into the most beautiful field, teeming with abundant life.

But our king's abundance doesn't stop there. He doesn't just throw down his seed. But out of an abundance of love, our king, the word that became flesh, came from heaven to earth in order to throw down his life.

At the cross, he throws himself down to become the judgment bearer. And that judgment of God would fall down on him instead of you and me.

But now the question is this. Will you come and throw yourself down at the feet of the king and be part of that field filled with life?

[17:56] And if you do throw yourself down before the king, will you take up the command from the king to go into the world like the early disciples and be our witnesses to all the ends of the earth?

Isn't that amazing? That the mission of God, which we see come to fruition in 2000 years ago as Jesus proclaims the gospel and invites 12 men in the Middle East, has expanded into a worldwide movement.

That here in Glasgow, we believe in the same Christ. The fastest growing churches are in places like China, Africa, and even South America.

How did this happen? It happened because ordinary disciples like you and me took up the mission to spread the message of the king, not by force, not by political power, but by gossiping the gospel. Sharing the good news of Jesus wherever they will. Evangelism is not just for the few. It's for every believer. Whether we're at work, in our neighborhoods, at school, at the gym, or even the supermarket, or even on holiday.

[19:09] We're all called to be witnesses to the fact that we all belong to the kingdom of God.

People should see the effects of the gospel in our lives, in our marriages, in our parenting, in our friendships, in our work ethic.

And as Peter says, we should be able to give an answer for the hope that we have in Christ Jesus when people ask us why we believe. Evangelism is integral to discipleship.

It's through the gospel that people enter the kingdom of God. But it's by the very same gospel that people grow in the kingdom of God as we make disciples of one another.

You don't need to be a seasoned evangelist like Billy Graham or Rico Tice. You just need to be you in Christ Jesus and share your faith when the opportunity arises.

At CCG, we're investing in evangelism training through our community groups. If you're not part of one, I encourage you to join one. Speak to one of the elders after the service and we'll help you get plugged in.

[20:17] The mission is for all of us. Second sub point. The casting of seed will produce mixed responses. If you've done much evangelism, you will know that the gospel always produces varied responses.

In the parable of the sower, the seed falls in different kinds of soil and each soil represents a different response to the message. When you experience rejection, indifference or even hostility in evangelism.

It's important to remember it's probably not a reflection on you. The fault isn't with the sower or the seed. The fault lies in the soil.

The condition of the heart. This is what Jesus explains in the parable. He's diagnosed in the reasons people don't accept the gospel. The different soils represent the spiritual condition of people's hearts.

Jesus was warning his listeners then and he's warning us here this afternoon. How we listen to God's word matters. One preacher puts it this way.

[21 : 30] The parable gives us three litmus tests to determine whether or not we have truly heard or understood the gospel. So let's consider each one.

Soil number one is the hardened heart. The seed that falls along the path where it's trampled underfoot and is then eaten by birds. Jesus is warning us to be aware of listening to God's word with a hard heart.

A hard heart can be indifferent or even hostile to the gospel. It's possible to be in regular contact with the word of God. Coming to church, hearing sermons, reading the Bible and it still doesn't penetrate your heart.

This can happen when we become indifferent or when our hearts are so set in our own way that we refuse to even listen. Why is it some people's hearts are hardened?

Well, Jesus identifies that these people are victims or prisoners of the evil one, Satan. The great deceiver, the father of lies, the one who works to prevent people from taking God's word seriously.

[22 : 43] He wants to keep people in spiritual blindness so they never understand or ever respond to the gospel. Some of you here may be skeptical and think, I don't believe in Satan.

But perhaps that's the kind of lie he wants you to believe. As the character Verbal Kent says in the movie *The Usual Suspects*, the greatest trick that the devil ever pulled was convincing the world he didn't exist.

It's a lie that many have bought into. But Jesus warns us that the hardened heart is under the influence of the evil one who seeks to keep people from understanding the truth.

If you're hearing this and thinking, that's not me. Ask yourself, is my heart truly open to God's word? Or have I become indifferent? The second soil, the shallow heart. The second type of soil is shallow soil.

[23 : 50] It sits on top of a rocky substrate, allowing the seed initially to take root and sprout quickly. However, when the sun comes out, the moisture in the soil evaporates and the plant withers and dies.

Jesus explains that this represents the one who hears the word with joy. But when faced with trials or testing, they fall away because they have no roots.

Beware of having a shallow heart. This is a warning against superficial real faith. These are people who follow Jesus because of the benefits that the gospel promises.

Rather than having a genuine commitment to him, the king. In Jesus' day, this was evident in the crowds who followed him because of the miracles and the hope of being healed. Or the sense of community that they might receive of being a part of a big crowd.

People followed him for blessings. But not necessarily for the cost of true discipleship. And our context is still true.

[24 : 56] This is still true today. Many people come to church seeking community, friendship or the positive environment that church offers. Some may even be enthusiastic, attending church regularly, bringing friends and witnessing to others.

On the surface, they seem like genuine believers. But when life gets hard, when suffering, persecution or trials arise, they weather and they fall away.

For instance, when they encounter ridicule from friends or family for their faith. Or when they face disappointment or loss in life. It's in these moments people start to question God's goodness.

They ask, why would a good God allow this to happen? It's under such testing, their faith crumbles under pressure. And they become disillusioned, bitter and end up walking away from the faith altogether.

Soil number three describes the divided heart. This is the seed that fell among the thorns. At first it seems to thrive.

[26 : 03] But as it grew, the thorns crowded out the plant. Jesus explains that this represents people who hear the words and initially appear to make good progress in their faith. But the cares

or the worries of the riches and pleasures of life eventually choke the word, preventing them from bearing fruit.

Here Jesus warns us to beware of having a divided heart. These are people who want to follow Christ, but are deeply committed to other pursuits.

As Jesus taught in the Sermon of the Mount, no one can serve two masters. Either you hate the one and love the other, or you'll be devoted to the one and despise the other.

The divided heart is pulled in many directions, devoted to God, but also devoted to other pursuits of wealth, comfort and pleasure.

It's easy to become consumed by career aspirations, financial security, material possessions and the desire for a comfortable life. These things are not inherently bad.

[27 : 11] But when they become the focus of our hearts, they can quickly become the idols that control our lives and will eventually destroy us by choking our faith.

On the day that Jesus taught this parable, the crowd before him reflected all these different responses. Hard hearts, shallow hearts and divided hearts.

As tragic as these responses are, Jesus was not deterred by them and neither should we be. While we may encounter many who seem indifferent or distracted, our calling is to continue to sow that seed.

We don't know the type of soil each person represents that we make, and we cannot predict how they will respond. May we never ever be guilty of writing someone off by saying that they are beyond the pale of God's grace.

We are called to faithfully sow the word, trusting that God will provide the increase. At least, maybe in our last and final point, God's word is always effective in mission.

[28 : 26] The last type of soil described is good soil. And it's this soil that produces a yield of a hundred fold. Good soil is marked by fruitfulness, and it's this fruitfulness is a direct result of the seed that's received.

Unlike the first soil, good soil holds on to the word of God rather than letting it be snatched away. It takes its roots deeply, ensuring that it can withstand the heat of testing and the distractions of worldly temptations that the other soils failed to endure.

And the result is it bears fruit. Jesus says the yield is a hundred fold, indicating abundant spiritual fruit, wherein Christians grow up into the maturity of Christ.

But this abundant yield isn't just about spiritual growth for individuals. It's about multiplication. A plant that produces fruit doesn't just grow for its own sake.

It also reproduces itself. This is the picture of true discipleship. Those who have received the word and who have allowed it to transform their lives cannot help but keep it to themselves.

[29 : 42] They have to let it out. They can't hold this amazing gift that they've received. And because of the abundant love that they've experienced through Jesus, they want others to know about this Jesus.

That's why they become active participants in God's mission, sowing the seed of the gospel in the hearts of others. But you might be wondering, how do I become good soil?

Well, the truth is, we can't make ourselves good soil. Good soil always starts with humility and the recognition of need.

It's when we understand that we're helpless, that we're helpless, lost sinners, that we're nothing without Jesus, that we can truly be in a position to receive the word.

If you want to be good soil this afternoon, the appropriate response is to pray, Lord, help me in my unbelief. All we can do is come to Jesus as needy, helpless sinners, recognizing that we cannot change ourselves, but we need to trust in him, the king of the kingdom, and trust in his power to transform us.

[30 : 58] As we examine our hearts in light of this parable, let's ask ourselves, what kind of listener am I? If your heart is hard like the first soil, pray that God will soften your heart.

Ask him to open up your ears and to give you understanding. If your heart is shallow like the second soil, ask the Lord to give you deeper roots in his word.

May your faith not be superficial, but endure the trials of life. And if your heart is divided like the third soil, ask the Lord to remove the idols in your life, whether they be money, materialism or worldly success.

Take heed of Jesus' words. Seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be taken care of. And if your heart is fruitful like the final soil, the good soil, well, do what we did in that first song, rejoice.

Rejoice and give thanks to God. Ask him to direct you to places where you can serve and share the gospel with others. Now, I know some of you, as you listen to this parable, you may be feeling heavy hearted.

[32 : 25] As you think of loved ones who have shown promise, but have fallen away. Or perhaps you have family or friends who seem so hardened to the gospel, and you're wondering what more can I do?

Let me encourage you to keep praying. Remember, it's God who softens hearts. Keep sowing the seed of the gospel and trust in God's timing.

Let me close with a story. My wife, Jill, grew up as a hardened atheist. One of her early encounters with a Christian was at school.

One of her school friends brothers tempted and did share the faith of Christ with her. He invited Jill to a Christian camp at high school, but Jill scoffed at the idea.

She said to him, if you need this Christian cult as a crutch, then go ahead. But I don't need it. And I certainly don't want it. That boy was a member of an SU group at his high school.

[33 : 34] And he was asked by the SU leader to write down the name of the least likely person that he knew that would ever come to Christ. Unbeknown to Jill, that young lad put her name down on a prayer list.

And for years, him and his friends prayed for her on a regular basis. Years later, the young man nearly fell off his seat when his big sister spoke of her shock, and bewilderment at finding out that her old school pal Jillian had just accepted Jesus as her Savior and Lord.

Jill had the opportunity to meet this guy. And she asked him, why did you choose me to be the least likely to come to Christ? And she told her, you seemed so hardened against God and the gospel.

You were so uninterested. So I put your name down. Now, this story is a reminder that what is impossible for us is possible for God.

We can't change hearts, but God can. So keep praying. Keep sowing. And keep trusting in his power to transform others.

[34 : 48] Let's pray. Father, we thank you for the picture that your word is a seed. Often we think of evangelism and preaching as something that happens in an instant.

But thank you for showing us in this parable that sowing is a process. The farmer sows, ploughs, waters, and then must wait for the crop to come.

Father, we praise you for your son. And out of the abundance of your love, he laid down his life in order to give us life. And we thank you that he took our judgment in order that we would be set free.

Thank you, Father, for making us children of the King. As your word goes across from pulpits across the world this day, for we long for that promise to be fulfilled in Habakkuk, that the earth would be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord as the waters cover the sea.

And until that day, may we be spurred on to leave this place to sow the precious seed of the gospel in this great city of Glasgow. And we cry to you this afternoon that great prayer.

[35 : 56] Lord, let Glasgow flourish through the preaching of thy word and the praising of thy name. In Jesus name we pray. Amen. We invite the band up and we're going to sing our next item of praise.

Jesus paid it all and across the lands. .