



Commissioning Sunday (Rom 15:14-21)

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KingsWay Community Church

Good morning, my friends! For those of you I have yet to meet in person, I'm Matthew, and I serve as lead pastor here at KingsWay. Today is a uniquely important gathering for our church. For the first time in more than a decade, we are sending out a family from our midst to plant a new local church. We are commissioning Josh Kruger Jr. to plant Sovereign Grace Church of Windhoek, Namibia.

It's a bittersweet morning for those of us who know Josh, Lieze, and their boys and developed new friendship with them over the last year during his pastoral training residency. It's sweet because we see God's hand on your lives in a remarkable way and we are convinced he has called you for such a task as this. It's bitter because we are going to miss you dearly. We really love you guys! The Lord has knit our hearts with yours and we're committed to standing with you – in friendship, financial support, and earnest prayer – as the Lord establishes a Word-centered, Spirit-empowered congregation in southern Africa.

In our land, there are many churches and many members in those churches who are doing all sorts of things in Jesus' name. Many of those things are good. But there's a danger. The fact that an individual member wants to do something, or a church is excited about doing something, does not make whatever they're doing a biblical priority. We might feel really excited. We may even raise a ton of money! But neither of those factors, by themselves, make something we do "for Jesus' sake" something that actually honors Jesus.

We need to look to Scripture to discern, "Lord, is this labor Josh & Lieze are eager to pursue (and we are eager to support) part of your missions strategy such that we can step forward confident in your help?" The local and global work we do in Jesus' name, will only succeed if it is consistent with the missions strategy God himself has given us.

If you brought a Bible, open it to Rom 15. I want to linger in vv. 14-21 for a few minutes because we need to recognize church planting is more than something Josh and Lieze are doing. This is something God is doing and something God has called us to get behind a church family – not once in a blue moon but as a lifestyle, something we are faithful to do again and again.



Here's my prayer for this morning: "Father, would you ignite a biblical vision in our hearts for church-planting. Make us a church that multiplies. Make us a church that sends our best. Make us a people who joyfully make whatever sacrifices are necessary so that those who have never been told of Jesus will see, and those who have never heard the truth about Jesus will understand." Hear the Word of the Lord:

I myself am satisfied about you, my brothers, that you yourselves are full of goodness, filled with all knowledge and able to instruct one another. But on some points I have written to you very boldly by way of reminder, because of the grace given me by God to be a minister of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles in the priestly service of the gospel of God, so that the offering of the Gentiles may be acceptable, sanctified by the Holy Spirit.

In Christ Jesus, then, I have reason to be proud of my work for God. For I will not venture to speak of anything except what Christ has accomplished through me to bring the Gentiles to obedience—by word and deed, by the power of signs and wonders, by the power of the Spirit of God—so that from Jerusalem and all the way around to Illyricum I have fulfilled the ministry of the gospel of Christ; and thus I make it my ambition to preach the gospel, not where Christ has already been named, lest I build on someone else's foundation, but as it is written, "Those who have never been told of him will see, and those who have never heard will understand."

In these verses, Paul explains the spiritual priorities that define biblical missions, using his own ministry as an example. Biblical missions is a ministry of the gospel accomplished by the Spirit that produces healthy local churches.

1) THE GOSPEL IS THE FOCUS OF BIBLICAL MISSIONS (vv. 14-16)

Paul neither planted nor pastored the church in Rome. But that doesn't stop him from exercising his God-given authority as an apostle of the risen Christ. After commending their spiritual maturity, he explains why he wrote them. V. 15, "But on some points I have written you boldly by way of reminder, because of the grace given me by God to be a minister of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles in the priestly service of the gospel of God..."

That's what I'm all about, Romans. I'm a minister of Christ Jesus. Christ is the source of my ministry. "We are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us" (2 Cor 5:20). And Christ is the substance of my ministry. "Him we proclaim, warning and teaching everyone with all wisdom" (Col 1:28). I work for King Jesus. I answer to King Jesus. In what I do and how I do it, I take my cues from him.



So what did Paul spend his time doing as a minister of Christ Jesus? There were arguably all sorts of good things he could have focused on. But one thing and only one thing was the supreme object of his concern, the focus of his public and private ministry. It was “the gospel of God,” the good news of the person and work of Christ and all he accomplished to work salvation for mankind. Look at v. 16. I am a “minister of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles in the priestly service of the gospel of God...”

The blazing center of biblical missions is not cultural transformation, political influence, or human flourishing in a broad sense. The blazing center is the advance of the gospel in the hearts and lives of God’s people. When Paul told the Corinthians, “For I decided to know nothing among you except Christ and him crucified” (1 Cor 2:2), he wasn’t choosing a missional option among many. He was embracing and devoting his life to what biblical missions is all about. It’s all about the gospel.

KingsWay, we are not apostles to the Gentiles in the same way Paul was. But the focal point of God’s mission hasn’t changed. “Christ and him crucified” remains the wisdom of God and the power of God. No other message can bring a sinner home to God. No other message can turn the heart of a child to their parents. No other message can change someone’s life from the inside out – their identity, relationships, affections, and ambitions.

More than we need a pay raise, physical healing, a friend, a spouse, or a vacation, we need the gospel. Paul isn’t talking merely about historical facts. Jesus lived. Jesus died. Jesus rose. He’s also talking about present and future implications. How does the gospel impact our conduct at work? How does the gospel impact the way we spend our money? How does the gospel impact our marriages or the way we raise our kids?

Paul did a lot of different things in a lot of different places over the course of his missionary journeys. But he had a singular focus – in this moment, in this relationship, in this public gathering – how can I testify to the good news of Jesus? As Levitical priest served the temple under the Old Covenant we are called, with Paul, in the priestly service of the gospel today. 1 Pe 2:9, “But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.”

If you’re a member of our church, ask the Lord to make the gospel the focus of your labor in every sphere of your life next year. When you’re at work, you are not there merely to pay the bills. You are there to proclaim and adorn the gospel. When you’re at home, you are not there to merely watch the kids. You are there to proclaim and adorn the gospel. When you’re at school or on vacation, you are not there merely to get good

grades or kick back and relax. You are there to proclaim and adorn the gospel. We exist to make much of Jesus, to show the world nothing is more satisfying than him. The focus of biblical missions is always the gospel.

Josh, a thousand things are going to compete for your time and attention over the next year. Remember, there's one thing that matters most. As a minister of Christ, you have been commissioned in the priestly service of the gospel of God. Make the gospel the focus of your labor and God will do through your ministry the same thing he did through Paul. He will create living sacrifices in Namibia. He will regenerate dead hearts through the power of the Spirit, bringing men and women into the freedom and joy of life in God's kingdom.

Only the gospel can do that, brother. So preach Christ and Christ alone. You're not going back to Windhoek because life is easier there. In many ways, it's harder, which is why so many of your friends expected you to stay here. You are going back to Windhoek for the sake of the gospel because the gospel is the focus of biblical missions.

2) THE SPIRIT IS THE POWER FOR BIBLICAL MISSIONS (vv. 17-19a)

In v. 17, Paul says something that at first glance could seem like a problem. He says, "I have reason to be proud of my work for God." Hold on a second, Paul. Last time I checked, pride is something God hates. Isn't boasting an expression of arrogance?

Friends, there is a kind of boasting, an expression of outspoken delight and exultation that is exceedingly good. In fact, it's the essence of true worship! It's a heart that exults in what God has done. Ps 66:5, "Come and see what God has done: he is awesome in his deeds toward the children of man." Paul's doing exactly what he told the Corinthians to do in 1 Cor 1:31, "Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord." But isn't Paul boasting in his work for God? How is he boasting in the Lord? Look at v. 18, "For I will not venture to speak of anything except what Christ has accomplished through me to bring the Gentiles to obedience..."

Did Paul work hard? Absolutely. He preached Christ throughout the entire eastern half of the Roman empire! And it wasn't exactly a walk in the park. 2 Cor 11:24-28, "Five times I received at the hands of the Jews the forty lashes less one. Three times I was beaten with rods. Once I was stoned. Three times I was shipwrecked; a night and a day I was adrift at sea; on frequent journeys, in danger from rivers, danger from robbers, danger from my own people, danger from Gentiles, danger in the city, danger in the wilderness, danger at sea, danger from false brothers; in toil and hardship, through

many a sleepless night, in hunger and thirst, often without food, in cold and exposure. And, apart from other things, there is the daily pressure on me of my anxiety for all the churches.”

But none of that labor – and it was exceedingly hard labor – was ultimately Paul’s doing. It was the Lord’s power at work in and through him. Isa 26:12, “For you have indeed done for us all our works.” As Paul looks back over his ministry, he doesn’t say, “What I have done is amazing!” No. “What you have done, Lord, is marvelous in my eyes.”

Sister, did you practice patience toward a disgruntled toddler this week? That was Christ at work through you. Brother, did you unselfishly shoulder extra responsibility at the office this week so a coworker could take time off? That was Christ at work through you. What about what Travis did in urging that man to trust and follow Jesus? That was Christ at work through him.

Whatever we have done in service of the gospel, God has done for us. Power for biblical missions comes from him. As Doug Moo observes, “The success of his ministry is due entirely to divine enablement. Christ is the active ‘worker’ in the things of which Paul is speaking; Paul is simply the instrument.”

So how exactly did Christ accomplish the ministry of the gospel through Paul? The same way he does it through us. Paul mentions three categories. Look at the end of v. 18. **First**, he does it “by word and deed,” through our speech that declares the truth about Jesus and through our actions that reflect the worth of Jesus.

Second (v. 19), he does it “by the power of signs and wonders.” There’s certainly a sense in which the way Paul cast out demons, raised the dead, or shook a viper off his unharmed hand reflect a unique moment in redemptive history. But our wonder-working God hasn’t changed, and spiritual gifts he pours out on every believer today are no less essential for the advancement of the gospel, including gifts that are manifestly supernatural.

When the Spirit gives you a prophecy or word of knowledge for someone that, unbeknownst to you, speaks exactly to what they’re experiencing or thinking, that’s a miracle! When the Spirit gives you faith to pray for someone who’s sick and they are healed, that’s a miracle! When you call upon the Lord to rescue someone who has been oppressed by an evil spirit and they are delivered, that’s a miracle!

Finally, Christ accomplishes the ministry of the gospel through us (v. 19) “by the power of the Spirit of God.” That’s not a third category distinct from the first two. That’s a summary of the whole enterprise! It cannot be otherwise, brothers and sisters. There’s no such thing as work for God done in our own strength or our own power. Doing God’s work requires God’s power. It always has and always will!

Remember that, Josh and Lieze. A mountain of work lies before you. You feel it. You know it. But it’s ultimately the Spirit’s work. He will speak through you. He will act through you. He will work miracles through you. Fear not, for he will empower you. Go forth this day, board your plane on Wednesday, with the unshakeable assurance that God is on the move in you and through you. You are an instrument in the skilled hands of a master workman who does all things well. The Spirit is the power for biblical missions, not you. And that’s good news for all of us!

3) THE CHURCH IS THE GOAL OF BIBLICAL MISSIONS (vv. 19a-21)

Wells are dug, micro-loans are issued, job skills are imparted, thousands of other good works are done by Christians around the globe in the name of biblical missions. Much of it is a fine example of obeying the Lord’s command in Gal 6:10, “So then, as we have opportunity, let us do good to everyone, and especially to those who are of the household of faith.”

However, when Paul summarizes the result of all the gospel ministry the Spirit empowered him to do, he points to something different. He points to local churches. “For I will not venture to speak of anything except what Christ has accomplished through me to bring the Gentiles to obedience...so that from Jerusalem and all the way around to Illyricum I have fulfilled the ministry of the gospel of Christ.”

Jerusalem is a city in modern day Israel. Illyricum is a Roman province in modern day Albania. Paul’s talking about a geographic arc that basically covered the eastern half of the Roman empire! And what does he say about it? In that entire area, and it’s a massive area, “I have fulfilled the ministry of the gospel of Christ.”

Are you serious? How can you say that, Paul? Are you saying everyone in that area is a Christian? Or that the Christians in that area have worked out all the implications of the gospel in every area of life? The following verses clarify his meaning. V. 20, “Thus I make it my ambition to preach the gospel, not where Christ has already been named...” Or v. 23, “I no longer have any room for work in these regions.”



Why not? Because he had finished planting local churches in all the key cities from Jerusalem to Illyricum. Places where Christ once was not named now had a congregation proclaiming the name of Jesus to their neighbors and all who passed through – places like Cyprus, Antioch, Iconium, Lystra, Derbe, Philippi, Thessalonica, Berea, Athens, Corinth, Ephesus, Troas, and many more. Paul’s work was finished because a multitude of churches were equipped and positioned to faithfully proclaim and adorn the gospel.

The great goal of gospel ministry in the power of the Spirit is not merely to win as many converts as possible or demonstrate God’s love to as many people as possible. The great goal, God’s eternal purpose in Christ Jesus, is to gather his people into healthy local churches marked by the right preaching of the Word, the right administration of the sacraments, and the right practice of church discipline. Eph 3:10, “So that through the church the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places.”

Missions work where the endgame is something other than healthy local churches falls short of the goal of biblical missions. Several years ago, our elders, in partnership with our International Missions Committee, developed a list of 7 guiding biblical principles for missions. Here’s principle #1: *“Our mission as a church is to make disciples of Jesus Christ. We begin with the end in view by prioritizing the work of planting and building healthy, indigenous churches in all our frontier missions activity, especially in areas that do not yet have a viable Christian witness.”*

KingsWay, that’s why we are sending Josh to plant a church in Windhoek. We are convinced from Scripture that planting and building healthy local churches is the goal of biblical missions. It was in the 1st century when Paul labored. It remains so today. May we engage in other activities along the way? Certainly. But the local church must remain the center of our missions strategy because Christ has placed the church at the center of his missions strategy.

Years ago, Josh has told me, “Matthew, I’ve never been part of a church on African soil that I wanted to replicate.” That grieved my heart, brothers and sisters, because it grieves God’s heart. How Christ longs for his bride to be made ready, not just in Midlothian, but in every nation in the world!

Josh and Lieze, we believe the Spirit is going to use you to plant a healthy local church in Windhoek that will be replicated throughout southern Africa. What you have seen and grieved, the Spirit will use you to heal and restore. Know as you return home to plant Sovereign Grace Church of Windhoek that you are engaged in the most



important, eternally-influential work Christ rose to accomplish, building up his chosen bride.

CONCLUSION

Our prayer is that God would fulfill through your Spirit-empowered ministry the same promise he fulfilled through Paul's ministry. In v. 21, Paul quotes from Isa 52:15, "Those who have never been told of him will see, and those who have never heard will understand." Josh and Lieze, the Servant of the Lord Isaiah longed for God's chosen people to see is the Christ you have purposed to proclaim.

Take heart in the two "wills" in v. 21. The sovereign authority of Almighty God stands behind them. It's a sure promise, written with the blood of Christ. Those who have never been told of Jesus *will* see. Those who have never heard the truth of the gospel *will* understand. Your gospel-centered, Spirit-empowered, church-building labor in cause of biblical missions will not be in vain.

That's our confidence as we commission you today and contemplate the mission God has set before all of us. Our hope in the work is not in you any more than it is in ourselves. Our hope is in the Lord. Biblical missions is a ministry of the gospel accomplished by the Spirit that produces healthy churches. For the sake of his glory, God will surely do it, brothers and sisters. Let's pray and for the Spirit's help!