

Good afternoon, good to see you. We are continuing our series exploring and working through the values of Regions Beyond, of which as a church we are a part. Values that as Gateway church, we believe not only should we embrace as a church family, but also seek to exhibit and live out as individuals as well. This is because we believe them to be biblical and modelled throughout scripture. Not just because they are the latest trend or sound good.

The value we are looking at today is titled “ Devoted to mission”.

The term Mission can be misleading in today’s world. We hear it in lots of different contexts. “mission, mission work, mission statement, mission impossible, mission critical, secret mission, mission ready, the great commission, and so on. You can probably think of a few more. It always sounds very important and probably life threatening and urgent. Yet in Christian life it can be vague, hazardous, and applied to just about anything to do in church life.

Yet as a generalisation, mission, within the church context can be seen as some form of evangelistic outreach or charitable work. So when I mention mission today this is what I will be mainly referring to

You might ask yourself the question, Is there a scale of mission work importance? Is doing tea and coffee mission work? how does this compare to running an orphanage in Africa? Is delivering leaflets in our neighbourhood the same mission as being a missionary in rural communist china?

Sadly over the years, mission in the Uk church has sometimes come with a pressure and people can feel obliged to “engage in mission.” Even if this was not the intention. Serving out of duty not love

Sometimes we stand in awe of those who are missionaries and tell amazing stories of miracle after miracle in far flung parts of the earth. Leaving the rest of us feeling slightly inadequate

So what does mission really mean? And how and why should we be devoted to it

Well the word itself has its origins way back in the murky mists of the 16th century, from its Latin root “ mitto” meaning “ I send’. Variants of this verb survive in our language today. for example “Your car **emits** exhaust gas”

Over time it has turned in to the word mission.

but to be honest that doesn't massively help... The word mission and its roots in the verb "to send" are more applicable to those that are sent out from a church. The apostle Paul and Barnabas being sent to Antioch for example, Philip being sent to meet the Ethiopian eunuch, Jesus sending out the 12 and 72 perhaps. But it doesn't seem to have much to do with a clean-up or sponsoring a child through school in Africa.

It seems to have become more of a blanket term than or even controversially a Christian "buzz" word.

Regions Beyond have kindly produced a 14 page document to help try and bring back to basics what mission is and our response to it. And how ever long this sermon takes today, it will still be shorter by 2000 words than the document – so no complaints and I expect you to all stay vaguely awake.

Aside from its length, It is a challenging document.

Approaching mission from a completely different set of parameters than is taught in many churches. It may even be different from your own experience.

I will say this: It is worth your time to read it.

I will this afternoon try and give an outline of the theme of the paper, and some thoughts that I hope will enable us to refresh our view on Mission.

but before we start , let's get this out of the way at the beginning.

If you are a Christian here today, being devoted to mission is a value that impacts us all individually and as a church.

It is inescapable. Please do not put it to one side in your mind and write it off as something for the person sitting next to you, Or for those in some form of church leadership, or with special gifting's. Or that it is for those that are older or younger than you. It is a value that is applicable to all God's children.

When we talk of mission, we each will have a different set of experiences. For some it will be positive and for others not so. For me mission has always been very people focused interacting with people from all walks of life. For others mission is through practical, financial or some other means.

For me my adventure- and I use that word adventure purposefully, in mission started about 16 years ago, when through a series of circumstances and prophetic words, I ended up traveling to Macedonia helping set up a youth

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centre, then moving into neighbouring Kosovo. This was only a couple of years after the war there.

I was there as part of a team supporting a young church. This trip was a massive culture shock to a guy from a nice Pentecostal church in Sussex. I have never prayed so much to stay alive as I did on that trip! It was scary, funny and moving all at the same time. I was staying in a room in an odd hotel over a night club with no opening window, in summer, with a smelly drain in the open plan bathroom that made me feel sick, so didn't really sleep. The food was questionable. I travelled through multiple military checkpoints, with a team I didn't really know. I got through one check point, because our driver told the guards I was a UN ambassador- which bizarrely they believed. We nearly died multiple times on the roads including watching a fuel tanker nearly jack-knife in front of us on the motorway to avoid a horse and cart. I nearly wasn't allowed out of Kosovo because they thought I was a soldier and was leaving without permission. Let alone I, dislike flying and prayed so much on the turbulent flight back, the man sitting next to me got up and moved... This and a host of other blood pressure raising events occurred on my first "missions trip".

But overall it opened my eyes to the fact that there was a world in need outside my own little bubble.

later on, I spent 5+ years every Friday night and some Saturday nights walking the streets of my home town, whatever the weather or temperature- between the hours of 9pm and 4am with Street Pastors.

Helping those, who were out and about during those hours. Helping those that were drunk, beaten up, homeless, in emotional crisis, or lost just to name a few. As well as often stopping some members of my team getting arrested, pepper sprayed or beaten up themselves for being too heavenly minded for any earthly use at times..

I have done "missions" with Youth for Christ partnering with police and football clubs using sport, and music as way of connecting with youth and teens.

I have done missions in Ireland and even port Talbot

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For years I have helped out at various Christian conferences such as soul survivor

and spring harvest helping 11-14 year olds with additional needs. This is where I met my lovely wife Katherine who was heading up that team. Yet the year I met her, I had gone out of duty, and had the right hump over my assigned task. Yet I obeyed and ended up with a wife and child many years later – so obedience is always worthwhile...

My last Job was working with teens to mid-20's from a tough estate that was an over spill from Manchester. Helping them with the daily pressures of life that came from the socio economic area they lived in. Issues such as sex, drugs, money, family feuds, fighting, and retribution. At the same time helping them try and make sense of God's love, salvation, forgiveness and mercy and what it meant to be part of a church.

I have done other bits in between. My family are involved in mission, my dad and sister are Chaplin's to the Sussex ambulance service, My Dad helps run a charity in Greece that houses and provides support for persecuted Christians. My sister has always been involved in mission through various Christian charities and organisations. She has even had to flee with her team with armed guards out of a town in Uganda because of a mob chasing after them, due to sharing the gospel there. She currently works in London for a charity using specially kitted out double decker busses to go into tough estates and work with the youth there. So as a family mission, is never far from discussion.

Yet this is all very well, but what does that have to do with us this morning. How does that help me or you now in Wrexham??

Well in my experience there are four main Christian responses in the UK to the term "Mission", when it is brought up in church. And it might be worth taking a moment to see which of these you think you best identify with.

Firstly: Those that get very excited and can't wait to run out the building, pack their bags for a trip to a remote part of the Amazonian jungle, to share the gospel via the medium of fruit to a previously unknown tribe that doesn't speak English, trusting that God will provide everything they need as and when they need it and prevent them being eating by scary looking spiders..

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Secondly: Those who rapidly pray that God would use them in any other way, but please don't send them to the deepest depths of Africa, or to the bloke next door because he's really annoying..

Thirdly: Those who suddenly turn into Christian Ninjas. Able to disappear for the duration of whatever the said mission was, then mysteriously reappear when it is over...

Fourthly: Those who are not really sure what the mission is and wonder what the benefit is, of doing whatever the mission is and how does it link to the bible and why is everyone so excited about it?

Ok so I'm exaggerating a bit..., maybe.. But whenever the term mission is thrown up in a church it does provoke many different responses. Whatever your response, undoubtedly the words of Jesus in Mathew 28:18-20 the great commission can be found ringing in our ears...

"Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."

When we think of missions work, you might think about: evangelising and sharing the gospel in odd places, or food bank, or helping orphans in Africa , youth work, prison work or supporting persecuted Christians in certain countries as examples. All of which are vital works and are part of a Christians call to share the gospel and look after those in need. Phil was raising the value of looking out for the Poor last week. I hope you were as challenged as I was. I would also commend to you the book that Phil recommended: " the myth of the undeserving poor". Its' worth reading.

But before we run off and consider any form of mission work. We need to go back to basics. Lots of charities do these things just as well or even better than churches. So what is it that sets apart Christian mission work from charitable works?

It is the motivation behind it.

The paper RB have put out seeks to bring us back to the original motivation behind any form of missions work.

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Regions beyond statement of purpose regarding mission is as follows:

“We are passionate about fulfilling our call to see the Kingdom of God extended locally and internationally, and are committed to taking the gospel to the ends of the earth, motivated by a desire for Jesus to have worshippers from every people-group and for God to receive the glory.’

The key segment in this is “for God to receive the glory.” **This is the root of mission.**

Why is this?

God is worthy of all praise. We have a whole bible that tells us this. If we take a few passages, even out of context, we can still see this.

psalm 90:2

“ Before the mountains were born
or you brought forth the whole world,
from everlasting to everlasting you are God.”

or Colossians 1:16

For in him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; **all things have been created through him and for him.**

or Isaiah 40: 25-26

“To whom will you compare me? Or who is my equal?” says the Holy One.

Life up your eyes and look to the heavens: Who created all these? He who brings out the starry host one by one, and calls each by name. Because of his great power and mighty strength not one of them is missing.”

Or Rev 4:11

‘You are worthy, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honour and power, for you created all things, and by your will they were created and have their being’.

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we read in Ephesians 1: 4 -6,

For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love he predestined us for adoption to sonship through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will — to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the One he loves. ...

or Isaiah 43:7

“ Everyone who is called by my name, whom I created for my glory, whom I formed and made.”

God is worthy of all praise. Our very lives are for the glory of God

We were created to bring praise and glory to God. Everything we do, everything you do.. branches off this.

The paper quotes John piper, from his book “ Let the nations be glad, the supremacy of God in missions” :

He writes: “When this age is over, and the countless millions of redeemed fall on their faces before the throne of God, missions will be no more. It is a temporary necessity. But worship abides forever.”

“Worship has always been and will always be the ultimate purpose of God in the universe. ... It (worship) is the goal of missions because in missions we simply aim to bring the nations into white-hot enjoyment of God’s Glory. The goal of missions is the gladness of the peoples in the greatness of God. It is also the fuel of missions ... you can’t commend what you don’t cherish.”¹

The root of any mission work therefore is to bring glory to God; it is for Jesus to have more worshippers. It’s about Him receiving the glory He deserves.

Mission and mission work is worship to God.

Yet as I was reading this I found the phrase at the end of that quote really challenged me. *“ you can’t commend what you don’t cherish”*

This statement dovetails on to the end of Jesus’ teaching in Mathew 6:21.

¹ John Piper, Let the Nations Be Glad! The Supremacy of God in Missions. IVP 2010

“For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.”

Jesus' words here, I think slam right into the middle of so many areas of what we call church life and the decisions we make as Christians. Why we do what we do. From turning up to church and midweek meetings, to engaging in charitable works locally as a church, to being involved in works being done overseas or further afield. It affects how we are in church, how we sing or contribute, how we talk and act to each other. What we like and dislike about church, how we spend our time.

This leads us to ask ourselves 2 awkward questions this morning.

1stly What's your treasure ?

2ndly What do you cherish?

perhaps : Family?, work?, money? Your collection of something, your clothes, food, your time? Hobbies, expensive possessions, House, career, health? Sport, friends..

The things we cherish, we talk about or, post about on social media, spend our time and resources on, encourage others to engage in, spend our spare brain time thinking about.

Where is your heart this morning? What do you cherish?

Our answers to these questions affect our response to “ Missions work”, and affect the time, energy and resources we have to devote to missions work.

We need to be honest with ourselves and God here.

There are so many things in life vying for our attention, some good, some necessary and some bad. This is before you even arrive at church and then another load of things are asked of you. We can get overloaded. We get tired.

Therefore as Christians it is really good to regularly stop and just remind ourselves why we are Christians, why we go to church, what church is and why we do all we do, both in and out of church. Life can get busy and crazy and its easy to lose perspective.

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We should as a priority remind ourselves, that as Christians we have been saved by grace: We are reminded of this in Ephesians 2:8

“ For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God”

or in the words of my favourite song of all time:

Amazing Grace, How sweet the sound

That saved a wretch like me

I once was lost, but now am found

T'was blind but now I see

Our response to this grace should not be to sit back and chill. Our response **should be and is to** worship. We must remember that worship is not just singing a few songs on a Sunday. They are just songs. Yet the Songs are designed to help us vocalise what should be in our heart. Enabling us to sing in unison of the amazing grace of God, his love and mercy and Jesus' redemptive work ,and the joy of spending eternity in heaven praising God.

I love the musical side of worship, but that is only one segment of our praise and worship. It is not the be all and end all, as it sadly seems to have become in many Christian circles.

We are reminded in Romans 12:1

“ Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, **in view of God's mercy**, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—**this is your true and proper worship.** “

Our response to God's grace is a whole life of worship, made up of various sections and activities.

Our lives of worship should be a natural response to God in thanks for his amazing mercy, grace and salvation. Yet so often it seems we have to work hard just to sing a few songs or deliver some leaflets.

We can't escape statements such as Romans 5:8-9

“But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

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Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved from God's wrath through him!

Christ died for us, for you and me. Yet we get a bit funny about time, weather, money and all sorts when it comes to engaging in some form of mission work.. yet our arguments seem a bit insignificant compared to what Jesus went through for you and for me.

Now don't get me wrong, I battle and have battled so often with this over all the things I have been involved in over the years. Walking around as a street pastor at 2 am, in sub zero temperatures, to help people that have got themselves into an intoxicated mess, ending up sitting in a lake of their own vomit, or want to vent years of anger at the church at me, because I was there. Dealing with Teenagers engaged in actions and relationships that you know will have long term consequences and having to make choices to help them and desperately praying you have done the right thing and not made it worse. Turning up to lead the musical worship or speak when you have had an awful night or are struggling with your own issues and then someone comments negatively about the songs, or your speaking style. It's at these times ,I have asked myself the question why am I doing this, what's the point? Yet the next verse of Romans 5 comes to mind:

“For if, while we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through his life!”

I was once an enemy of God, so were you. Yet God had mercy on you and me. If it wasn't someone sharing that in some way with you, you would still be an enemy of God.

How we live our lives, what we say and do, how we think, how we spend our time and money, our attitudes, our jobs, giving, singing, praying, encouraging, charitable works, all this is worship and we should be devoted to worshiping God, by any and every means.

Our worship should be like a beautiful diamond. Made up of many facets, intrinsically linked with our lives.

Missions work therefore is a facet of our worship and cannot be detached from our worship or our lives.

we must be devoted to mission.

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We have been saved by grace, So we respond by living lives of love, worship and obedience.

If we go back to our quote from John Piper where he says worship of God is the fuel of missions, we go out to the world around us because we want to commend God and his amazing salvation and mercies to it. We do this because we cherish God and all that he has done for us.

We are ALL called to missions work. And if worship is the fuel of missions work, **we all** have the fuel to engage in this area. Age, time, finance, skill set, experience, spiritual maturity, church experience or position, these are all used as both justifications for engaging in mission, but more often, excuses not to.

We can all worship God with or without that list of things. It is a heart response. If you love God, every area of your life is and should be offered up as worship to God. So engaging with what we might consider traditional or non-traditional missions works should be easy if our hearts are in the right place.

As John Stott writes:

“The highest of all missionary motives is neither obedience to the Great Commission (important as it is), not love for sinners who are alienated and perishing (strong as that incentive is, especially when we contemplate the wrath of God), but rather zeal – burning passionate zeal – for the glory of Christ.”

A few weeks back Nigel was reminding us about grace. He pointed out that one of our responses to God’s grace is to serve. This is not to try and buy our salvation. Serving in the church and serving those around us is a response of love and worship to God because of what we have received.

So what missions work should you and I get involved with?

Should we all jump on the first plane to North Korea or hire a canoe and sail down the amazon looking for lost tribes? No, although for some that may be appropriate if that is what God has specifically called them to.

I know for me my personal circumstances have changed over the last few years. I can’t just get up and get involved with whatever I want whenever I want. I have responsibilities. God has entrusted me with a wife and child. Yet

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how I look after them is part of my worship to God. My mission field is the people I now have contact with, the street I live in. Alongside the things we do as church.

Yet if God says go, I will go.

As John Stott carries on from his earlier statement:

“The mission of God, therefore, is that dynamic divine love that drives God to seek the ultimate well-being and blessing of human beings by bringing them into relationship with himself in which they love, worship and glorify him and find their greatest joy in doing so.

So also the mission of God’s people is to be agents of that redemptive love of God. We live to bring others to worship and glorify the living God, for that is where they will find their greatest and eternal fulfilment and joy.”

We are agents or ambassadors of God’s redemptive love. Its part of your very DNA

Each of us must not forget that we were made in the very image of God.

Genesis 1 v 26- 27

“So God created human beings in his own image, in the image of God he created them;

male and female he created them.”

we were designed to represent God on earth and to creation.

The RB paper states:

“So many Christians exclude and disqualify themselves, believing that they don’t matter; that they don’t have a part to play. Yet the truth is we all have the privilege of representing God wherever we are, of actually showing people something of who God is, and we all have the opportunity to bring God’s rule and reign into the situations and circumstances we find ourselves in daily. “

It goes on to say:

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“We are called to be a people who ‘seek first the Kingdom’; for whom seeing the rule and reign of God come increasingly in our day, both locally and in the nations, is both our passion and our priority.

Whatever our sphere of influence in life we have the privilege and responsibility of being Ambassadors of the Kingdom, and of His Kingdom coming in us and through us. Whenever God is obeyed, the Kingdom of God comes. When the sick are healed, when captives are set free, when justice comes, when the broken are comforted and restored, when the poor are cared for and given dignity, when we see His will being done ‘on earth as it is in heaven’, His kingdom is coming. This should excite us and fuel us!

God will call each of us to different things. Give us different gifting’s, different spheres of influence. Some perhaps to another part of the globe or to serve at an event or specific area. If those opportunities come up to go, consider them. God may be wanting to grow you, and show you something. Don’t miss out.

If God calls you somewhere, go. But until then you are where God wants you. So get stuck in, in your sphere of influence. Don’t begrudge or belittle what you have or where you are. You are where you are for a reason. Remember to your Family, friends, work colleagues, neighbours, through all the things we engage with as church. You are an ambassador. Each of us are already on a missions trip. It’s called your life.

Let your love of God, and his amazing grace fuel your mission or better put fuel your time on earth. Fuel your adventure with God.

as I stated earlier:

Our worship should be like a beautiful diamond. Made up of many facets, intrinsically linked with our lives.

Missions work therefore is a facet of our worship and cannot be detached from our worship or our lives.

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So to end let’s remember Paul’s words in Colossians 3:1-4

“Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things

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above, not on earthly things. For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God. When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.”

and 1 Corinthians 10:31, although slightly out of context the sentiment is appropriate and applicable.

“ So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God.”

Lets pray.