

“Your Mission, Should You Choose to Accept It . . .” (Part 1)

Introduction

The Text

⁴⁴ Then he said to them, “These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you, that everything written about me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled.” ⁴⁵ Then he opened their minds to understand the Scriptures, ⁴⁶ and said to them, “Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, ⁴⁷ and that repentance for the forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. ⁴⁸ You are witnesses of these things. ⁴⁹ And behold, I am sending the promise of my Father upon you. But stay in the city until you are clothed with power from on high.” (Luke 24:44–49)

“Your Mission, Should You Choose to Accept It . . .”

A. I’m titling this message “Your Mission, Should You Choose to Accept It . . .”

1. I’m just ripping that from Mission Impossible, if you’ve ever seen the old TV show or the newer movies. It would always begin with the main guy receiving some message concerning his mission from the upper authorities.
 - a. And then, I suppose, he had a choice: would he accept it—would he go out on this mission or not?
 - i. That would be a pretty lame movie if he didn’t accept it, right? “No, I don’t accept it, that sounds too dangerous.” “Well, okay, I guess that’s it then. Roll the credits. Show’s over.”

B. But, in many ways, this captures the essence of what’s happening here now in our text.

1. Jesus is giving his disciples (and as we’ll see, by extension, us as well) a mission. He’s laying out the marching orders for the children of God—what we’re to be about, what we’re to be doing.
 - a. And then we have a choice: what are we going to do about it? Are we going to accept it and engage this mission with all we have, whatever it may cost us? Or are we going to resist and reject it or at least water it down, and make it more palatable for us? Are we going to go all in or are we going to hold back?
 - i. That’s the question that’s really being thrust upon us here.

C. But before we can really make an informed decision on the matter we must spend some time figuring out what the mission even is—what Jesus means by what he says here. So that is what we shall be considering for the next couple of weeks.

1. So far as this mission is concerned, we'll look at (1) The What; (2) The Who; (3) The Where; (4) The When; and (5) The How—as it's outlined for us in this text.

- a. We'll take the first two this time and the latter three next time. So let's go!

(1) The What

To Proclaim

- A. We begin by considering The What of this mission. What is it? What are we to be doing exactly?
- B. While, of course, there is much we could discuss so far as the Christian's mission is concerned, there is one thing in particular that Jesus highlights for us here, namely: we are to proclaim.

1. Look at [vv. 46-47](#) again: “⁴⁶ Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead,⁴⁷ and that repentance for the forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name”

- a. Your job, before it is anything else, is to speak, to open your mouth, to proclaim. This is the essence of the missionary task.

- C. In the Greek, it's the verb [kērussō](#).

1. The word is translated as “to proclaim” here; elsewhere it's translated “to preach.”
 2. In the lexicon, it's defined as making a public declaration; or even more picturesque perhaps, it's likened to when an official herald would run into a city and make a formal announcement of some sort—“I've got something from the king, I've got something from the higher authorities, and y'all better listen up.”

- a. So Christians, in other words, have something to say.

- D. But now there are two observations I want to make concerning this proclamation we're called to: first, I want us to see the content of it; and, second, I want us to see the priority of it.

Observation #1: The Content of It

His Death and Resurrection

- A. Regarding this content, the first thing we must see here is that we are speaking of Christ's death and resurrection most of all.

1. That is what is brought out straightaway in [v. 46](#), if you noticed it: “[the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead . . .](#)”

- a. When we're proclaiming things “[in his name](#)” ([v. 47](#)) that's what it means. We're tethering the entirety of our message to this central and most significant fact: the

Son of God, the Christ, has come, suffered, died, and risen again victorious over Satan, sin, and death.

- i. We're talking about what he accomplished for us—and for the world—on the cross. That's the essence of our message.

B. You say: "Of course, Nick. This is pretty basic isn't it? We are called to preach the good news, the gospel. That's like Christianity 101, right?"

1. Oh it certainly is. But don't for a second take this for granted. Christians, and entire churches even, have this tendency, it seems to me, especially in our day, to drift away from the gospel for one reason or another.
 - a. For some it's a drift towards the prosperity gospel—where we think Jesus comes, not so much to forgive my sin, as much as to pad my wallet, and heal my sickness, and make me comfortable.
 - b. For others it's a drift towards the social gospel—where we come to feel like rather than going out and telling people about the cross, more important is that we go out and love people and get involved in politics and the pressing social issues of our day and things like this.
 - c. For others it's a drift towards the pragmatic gospel—where we come to church not to hear about the grace of God in Jesus but to get a few action items we can apply to our lives, improving our finances or our communication skills or whatever.
 - d. For others it's a drift towards the therapeutic gospel—where Jesus exists to coddle you and give you a heartwarming little nugget of encouragement, some chicken soup for your soul, if you remember those books.

- i. And I could just keep going. But you get the idea. We drift.

C. Examples of this sort of thing abound all around us, particularly here in the Bay Area, don't they?

1. I was talking with a brother just the other day. I asked him why he ended up at Mercy Hill. He said it was our doctrine—that we actually teach the Bible, the gospel, the cross. He said he'd gone to churches before where he'd bring his Bible and the whole sermon would go by and he wouldn't even need to open it. Because they didn't talk about it.

- a. There was a lot of talk, I'm sure, but there was no heralding, no preaching, no proclaiming the very matters Christ has called us to.

- i. So don't take this for granted. It's hard to stay on task. But stay on task we must! Whatever else we are up to as a church, we have to be up to this: preach the gospel—tell the world about the cross of Christ!

D. This is why Paul says in [1 Cor. 2:2](#): "I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified."

1. "I can't drift from this. I'm not going to get caught up in the tangents." If we keep this at the center, everything else will fall into place. But if we get off the cross, we go off the rails!

- a. This is why for my first official sermon as your pastor, when I arrived in June 2015, I preached on this text. I want this gospel to be the master theme of my ministry. I don't care if you call me redundant for preaching the cross week after week. That's what I've been commissioned to do. And I'd rather have God's commendation and your critique than have it the other way around.

Our Repentance for Forgiveness

- A. But there is more to what's outlined here by Jesus for us, right? We see that we ought to be proclaiming his death and resurrection.
 - 1. But this news, this good news, is not like so much of the news we read today, where we just kind of scroll through it. We look at the headlines and think: "Okay, isn't that interesting," and then we move on without giving it another thought. No!
 - 2. This news, while, in one sense, it's about the accomplishments of another, in another sense, it has everything to do with us, and it begs for a response.
 - a. In other words, this news is not neutral. We don't just scroll on by it to no consequence.
- B. And so the herald, the proclaimer, the man and woman on mission for God, they don't just talk about the triumph of the cross . . . they also talk about the necessity, therefore, of our repentance for the forgiveness of sins.
 - 1. That's what comes out there in v. 47, right? "[46](#) Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, [47](#) and that repentance for the forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name" (vv. 46-47).
 - a. "Repentance"—it's not a very popular word. Most find it offensive, really. But it's radically important, so far as Jesus is concerned.
- C. It's the Greek word [metanoia](#)—which is a compound of two words, really: [meta](#) = change (e.g. metamorphosis); and [nous](#) = mind. It's "a change of mind."
 - 1. It's the idea of conversion.
 - 2. It refers to the full motion of an about face.
 - 3. It captures both the sense of turning from and turning towards. So [Heb. 6:1](#) speaks of "[repentance from dead works](#)" and [Acts 20:21](#) speaks of "[repentance toward God . . .](#)"
- D. So the bottom line is this: you and I, in a fundamental way, are not right with God.
 - 1. The fact that this call to repentance is for Jesus an essential part of our proclamation clearly indicates that humanity stands in a wildly precarious place so far as our relationship with God is concerned. We are not on good terms. We are diametrically opposed. We are in need of turning, of repenting. That's what this means.

E. But, of course, what it also means, amazingly enough, is that, though we are standing in opposition to God, he is not standing in the same manner against us.

1. If you noticed, this call for repentance here comes in on the coattails of the cross—we talk about his death and resurrection . . . and then we call for repentance.

a. But, don't you see? This locates the call for repentance within the context of God's grace. Hence, this is, as Jesus puts it: ["repentance for the forgiveness of sins."](#)

i. God has made a way for us to come back to him. And he waits on the ready, eager for our turning. We stand opposed to him, but he stands ready to welcome us, if we would repent, about-face, come home. That's the idea here.

F. The bringing together of both repentance and forgiveness here keeps us balanced and helps protect us from making two devastating yet all too common errors in our proclamation . . .

ERROR #1: PREACHING REPENTANCE WITHOUT FORGIVENESS

A. This is just to carry on a bit further what I've just been saying. But I want to make it as plain as I can for us.

1. Too often, we can take repentance to mean we better clean up our act or else.

a. The picture we have is a God ready to smite us. He says it with a scowl.

i. The call to repent, doesn't sound like something that arises from a tender and broken heart.

ii. It sounds like something you say when you're fed up, when you're about to dropkick the person—akin to that old idea of demanding a person "Say uncle!" You ever heard that? I don't know what it means, but you say it when you've got your younger brother in a headlock or something, and you're not going to let him go until he gives up the fight, until he says "Uncle"—until, we could say, he repents.

b. And so we can get mixed up in that, and you got those hellfire and brimstone preachers who act like God actually doesn't like you, he's already lit the fire under you, he's kind of cackling like Dr. Evil over there, and he can't wait to see you go up in smoke.

i. Unless of course you repent, get cleaned up, make some good choices, do better, that sort of thing. Then he might permit your ongoing existence for a little while longer.

B. But, again, that's not the context of this call. It comes from a heart of grace. On both sides of this call right here in our text, we see it.

1. You have Jesus suffering and dying for you on the one hand there in [v. 46](#).
 2. And then you have the forgiveness mentioned as the point of this repentance on the other hand there in [v. 47](#).
 - a. The call to repent is surrounded by mercy and kindness and grace. We're not talking about an angry God here. We're talking about a God who loves you and has open arms on the ready if only you would lay down your weapons and come.
- C. And this is really the case whenever the Bible is talking about repentance . . .
- D. Listen to the way Jesus talks about it in [Luke 5:31-32](#): “³¹ Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick.³² I have not come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance.”
1. Now, you look at that on the surface and say: “I don't get it, Nick. He's calling sinners to repent. That doesn't prove your point one way or the other.”
 2. Ah, but the key is in the context again. You see, this statement is made while Jesus has gone in to sit around the table and fellowship eat with Levi this notorious tax collector and all his sinful buddies. And the Pharisees, seeing this, are grumbling about it. How could he go in and eat with tax collectors and sinners like this? That's when he says what he says. “I've come to call sinners to repentance.”
 - a. Well, this, then, is what it looks like to call “[sinners to repentance](#).” A meal, fellowship, love.
 - i. The call to repent, therefore, is not a call to say “Uncle” or else the other shoe will drop. No! It's a call to the table, to the party, to the banquet. It's an invitation to come fellowship with a God who loves you and has made the way of forgiveness possible.
- E. You know, it's like if you've offended someone—maybe you really hurt them, maybe you stole from them, something like this—and, one day, you get something in the mail from them. What are you thinking?
1. You're thinking it's hate mail at best. At worst it's going to be some legal demand that you pay up what you owe, that sort of thing.
 2. But you open it and instead you find an invitation, to come over dinner, to enjoy time together. He says he's already paid what you owe, he's absorbed your debt himself, and he still cares about you, loves you. Come!
 - a. That's the call to repent. That's the context.
 - i. It's not repentance without forgiveness. “Clean up, pay up, then maybe I'll have you over, I'll let you back into my life again.” No!
 - ii. It's repentance for forgiveness. The price of admission is already paid. It's a golden ticket. You just have to humble yourself and receive it, cash it in.

- F. This is the same sort of thing we see even more clearly in that cluster of parables in [Luke 15](#), where it's all about repentance. But it's placed within the context of God's love and joy.
1. There's a shepherd who finds his lost sheep, a woman who finds her lost coin, a father who finds his lost son. And they're rejoicing in this.
 2. And the consistent refrain is: "[Just so, I tell you, there will be . . . joy in heaven over one sinner who repents . . .](#)" ([Luke 15:7](#); cf. v. 10). God delights in this. He loves to forgive and embrace and welcome.
 - a. Of course, the most vivid of all these parables, is that of the Prodigal Son, right? He's sinned against the father in grievous ways. He wakes up to it. He repents. He starts to make his way home, thinking he'll have to earn his way back. But what does he find?
 - i. His dad isn't waiting arms crossed, scowled face. No. His dad sees him, comes running, embraces, throws a party. That's it!
- G. We mustn't preach repentance without forgiveness. Repentance is simply cashing in the golden ticket. The door is open. You can hear the music playing inside. There's a party in there. Will you turn and enter in the name of Christ, or not?
- H. And, of course, we've got to stop and apply this to ourselves.
1. Do you feel like you have an angry God? Are you constantly trying to clean yourself up, to pay him back, to atone for your sin on your own dime?
 - a. Listen, God calls you to repent with tears in his eyes. He already loves you. He's already made a way. He doesn't say: "Clean up and then you can come." He says: "Come and I'll clean you up."

ERROR #2: PREACHING FORGIVENESS WITHOUT REPENTANCE

- A. But there is another error that we must avoid as well. Sometimes we can preach repentance without forgiveness. But other times, we can preach forgiveness without repentance. You know what I mean, don't you?
- B. This is a big one in our day. I think it's safe to say this culture, if it wants anything, it wants forgiveness without repentance. We want love without truth.
1. We want people to tell us, not that we need to change or turn or repent, but that we're just fine the way that we are. We're all good. We're so lovely in and of ourselves, right? You just need to "love yourself." Isn't that the mantra?
- C. And we hear that God sent his Son to die for our sins and things, and we take it to mean, "Oh surely all is well with me then. He loves. He forgives. It's almost automatic. But this is a grave error!
1. Listen, just because God is ready and desiring to forgive any who would repent, doesn't mean he won't ultimately judge and condemn those who don't. Just because he's gracious,

it doesn't mean he's not also righteous. Just because he's merciful, it doesn't mean he's not also holy. Just because he's Savior, it doesn't mean he's not also Lord and Judge.

- a. God will, God must, condemn all evil in the end—either in Christ or, if you reject Christ, in hell.
- D. We can't preach forgiveness without repentance. But we're always making that error. And the Scriptures are always having to right the ship.
1. So Paul in [Rom. 2:4](#), when guys are just living in sin says: “[D]o you presume on the riches of his kindness and forbearance and patience, not knowing that God’s kindness is meant to lead you to repentance?”
 - a. Is God kind and ready to forgive? Yes!
 - b. But it's not automatic. You have to turn, humble yourself, come to him and let him change you. God's love doesn't mean you can keep on living in sin. God's love means he's trying to save you from sin.
 2. So Peter, likewise, in [2 Pet. 3:9](#), he's dealing with those who say: “God's not going to come in judgment. This is just an empty threat. He's too soft. He'll pushover in the end.” But Peter says: “The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance.”
 - a. Did you hear that? He's holding off on that day, not because he's some old sap in the sky who, when push comes to shove, won't uphold righteousness and the law and things.
 - b. No! He's holding off on that day because he's trying to give you time to come, to repent!
- E. And, again, we should pause and search our own hearts a bit.
1. Do we have a God who is just an old sap in the sky? He's a cosmic pushover. He's not going to judge. Are you living in sin and doing so casually, apathetically, because you're so convinced he'll just overlook it.
 - a. Beware. Repent. He is ready to forgive you, but it doesn't mean it's automatic. Get right with him. Don't wait!
- F. So this is the content of our proclamation. We're talking about Christ's death and resurrection; and we're talking about our repentance for forgiveness.

Observation #2: The Priority of It

- A. But, now, I said I also wanted to accent the priority of this proclamation. I'll be quicker here, but I think it's worth considering.
- B. I can't remember if I've ever brought this up before, but I probably have. Many Christians these days, maybe even you, have embraced that somewhat famous saying wrongly attributed to St.

Francis of Assisi (we don't know who said it, but somebody obviously did): "Preach the gospel at all times. When necessary, use words."

1. You know, on the one hand, I can appreciate the sentiment of this statement. If all we give people is mere talk than it is hypocrisy. We talk about how much God's love them, but we don't love them. If we share the gospel but we live against the grain of it, we often do more damage to the cause of Christ than good, right?
 - a. And so we say: "Yes, okay preach the gospel with your life." I get the heart behind that. It's not bad.
 2. But on the other hand this statement is dreadfully wrong and misleading. At the most basic level, it is impossible to preach the gospel without words. Because the gospel, before it is anything else, is words—it's good news about Jesus and the cross, as we've been saying. And you can't preach it without opening your mouth and speaking of it, full stop.
 - a. Jesus doesn't here say to his disciples: "Okay I've died and risen, now your mission should you choose to accept it is to go out and love people." That's true. That's good. But that's not what he says first and foremost.
 - b. He says: "You've got to go preach. You've got to go proclaim. The words get the priority. Because that's how they come to know who I am and what I've done and what it means for them and what they need to do to benefit from it and things."
 - i. And if you don't speak they won't get it. If you preach the gospel without words, well people will come away thinking you're a nice person, but they won't be cut to the heart with conviction for their sin, they won't be blown away by God's provision in grace for their pardon, and they certainly won't repent and be saved!
- C. This is what Paul is going for in that logical chain he forges in [Rom. 10: 14-15](#): " ¹⁴How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching [Gk. kērussō]? ¹⁵And how are they to preach unless they are sent? As it is written, 'How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news!'"
- D. We live in a day and age where people don't like to be preached at. They don't mind the "preach-with-your-life" thing, but to preach with words? Oh, that's offensive. How dare you?
 1. You don't have beautiful feet if you come preaching.
 2. Those feet are ugly, they're hairy and got all this fungus and things. Don't preach to me. It's demeaning, it's belittling, it's acting like you know.
- E. You see, we have an allergic reaction these days to anything that smacks of objective, absolute truth. We like agnosticism, relativism, postmodernism. There's no objective reality. "If it's true for you, that's great. But that's not true for me."

1. We like to bend truth in the direction of our desires. We don't like someone coming from the outside saying: "This is true whether you like it or not."
- F. Preaching isn't popular in our day.
1. So you've got churches swapping out their pulpits for these little tables. Did you notice that? That's not coincidental, that's intentional.
 - a. The pulpit says: "You better listen, put yourself under the authority of God's Word."
 - b. The table says: "How about we just talk about it."
 - i. The pulpit, preaching, it's a turn-off. We want dialogue, we want discussion, we want a table, with a little coffee mug on it, where we all feel like we can come sit around and have a chat. There's no right or wrong, or authority, there's just ideas and good conversation. That's the idea.
 - (1) Back in the day they would preach from pulpits as wide as tree trunks. There's roots going under this platform. There's stability. There's authority. There's an announcement to be made. There's good news to be preached.
- G. Now, don't get me wrong, Jesus welcomes discussion—we welcome discussion and dialogue, questions and wrestling, and all of that, it's wonderful.
1. But none of that changes the fact that the truth of the gospel is objective and absolute. We talk around it and slowly come to get more of it and all of this, but the content of this gospel, the substance of this proclamation concerning the accomplishment of Christ, it doesn't change—it is the same yesterday, today, and forever.
 - a. And proclaiming it is our top priority.
- H. This is our mission. It's proclamation. And now we see the content of it, and the priority of it.

(2) The Who

The Twelve

- A. When it comes to the Who here, I'm obviously not talking about the British rock band from the 60s. I'm talking about who is this mission for? Because we do need to think about that for a moment at least.
- B. Good biblical exegesis, or interpretation, would say, Jesus is technically here in our text, not talking to us is he? He's talking to his disciples—in particular, he's talking to the twelve apostles, right?
 1. So he says there in [v. 48](#): "You are witnesses of these things."

- a. And that word “witness” is a loaded term. There’s a legal sense to it. It refers to one who testifies about what he/she has seen, an eyewitness.
- C. And it’s very often used to refer to the apostles in particular . . .
1. So in [John 15:27](#), speaking to his apostles, he says: “[Y]ou . . . will bear witness, because you have been with me from the beginning.”
 2. This is why, in [Acts 1](#), when the apostles are looking to replace Judas, Peter says: “²¹ [O]ne of the men who have accompanied us during all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us,²² beginning from the baptism of John until the day when he was taken up from us—one of these men must become with us a witness to his resurrection” (vv. 21–22). This is a specific task for a specific person.
 3. Or later, in [Acts 10](#), when Peter is talking with Cornelius, he says: “³⁶ As for the word that he [God] sent to Israel, preaching good news of peace through Jesus Christ (he is Lord of all),³⁷ you yourselves know what happened throughout all Judea, beginning from Galilee after the baptism that John proclaimed:³⁸ how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power. He went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with him.³⁹ And we are witnesses of all that he did both in the country of the Jews and in Jerusalem. They put him to death by hanging him on a tree,⁴⁰ but God raised him on the third day and made him to appear,⁴¹ not to all the people but to us who had been chosen by God as witnesses, who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead.⁴² And he commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that he is the one appointed by God to be judge of the living and the dead.⁴³ To him all the prophets bear witness that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name” (vv. 36–43).
 - a. Doesn’t that just sum it all up for us? Who are the ones who are to witness and testify and preach this message of the cross and of repentance for the forgiveness of sins? Well it’s the apostles in particular, is it not? I would say so.

The Rest of Us

- A. And somewhere in the back of the room I hear a person breathing a sigh of relief. “Oh okay this is wonderful. This whole preaching business, talking about repentance and things, sharing the gospel, it’s not my job after all. I can go home, turn on the television, and call it good.”
 1. Well, not so fast. It is true that the mission is in a fundamental, primary, sense given especially to the apostles. It is in another subordinated, secondary sense, passed on to us . . . and we dare not fumble the baton.
- B. You say: “How do you know that Nick?” Well there are many reasons I could point you to here:
 1. I could point you to the fact that right there in the opening pages of the book of Acts, it’s not just the apostles who went about proclaiming the good news, but all the disciples.
 - a. We could talk about Stephen, or Philip, or this statement in [Acts 8:4](#), where we read: “Now those who were scattered went about preaching the word.” And we

know from [Acts 8:1](#) that this is explicitly not the apostles we're talking about here. But people in the church. People like you and I.

2. I could point you back to that text in [2 Tim. 4:2](#), where Paul tells Timothy, his young protégé, not an apostle: “[P]reach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching.”
 3. Or I could take you to Peter where he writes to the local churches filled with everyday Christians, saying: “You have been saved ‘that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light’ (1 Pet. 2:9).”
 4. I could point you to the gospel of Luke itself. Luke wasn't an apostle. He says in the opening verses of this book that he's just writing down all the stuff that “those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and ministers of the word have delivered [to him]” (Luke 1:2). He's not the witness or apostle, but he's still proclaiming this message for all to hear.
 5. But, you know, I think the simplest proof that you and I are called by God into this, in some subordinate, secondary sense, is the simple fact that all the apostles are dead, but the job is still not done.
 - a. “⁴⁶ Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, ⁴⁷ and that repentance for the forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations” (Luke 24:46-47).
 - i. **Panta ta ethnē**—arguable referring not just to countries but to individual people groups, many of which still haven't been reached with the gospel.
- C. If there are peoples and people who still have not heard, then there is work that still needs to be done.
1. This is our mission.
 2. The question is: will you accept it?