

# The Need to Become "Missional"

*Evangelism 101*

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Simon the sorcerer. We're not going to read the entirety of the story, I actually just want to read one very simple verse that leads into our study tonight of evangelism, the call that God has given each and every one of us to be missional, to be a missionary not just over there but right here.

In verse 5 of Acts 8 it says,

5 Then Philip went down to the city of Samaria, and preached Christ unto them.

Ladies and gentlemen, that is a very simple description of what it means to be missional, to go unto those who may be just down the road, those who have not yet heard, and to preach the gospel to them.

Let's pray.

*Heavenly Father, tonight as we continue to expound on your Great Commission, Lord, help us, O God, not just to hear the information, not just to see the statistics, not just to inspect the data but, Lord, put within each and every one of us a greater desire to see the gospel put forth not just over there which is wonderful but also in our own backyard. Help us, O God, tonight to be missional. It is in the name of Jesus Christ we pray. Amen.*

For those of you who are or have not been with us the last couple of sessions or weeks, we've been dealing with the idea of evangelism, sharing the gospel, in particular dealing with the fact that what we know as Western civilization, particularly the United States of America which has been historically one of the greatest mission-sending entities in the history of the world, has now become the mission field. We now have become a place where other sovereign entities are sending those called to share the gospel to our land. We have now been outnumbered by those mission-sending agencies from other countries and other places of the world. We find ourselves not just as mission-sending but as the mission field.

So how is it that you and I can make this mental emotional shift in our life to think of our own subdivision as the mission field, to think of our own communities as the mission

field, to think of our own backyard as a mission field? I want to begin with a reality check. In the United States of America, what we know as "the church" has lost its home field advantage. Now I know that's a sports reference but I think we're all familiar with what it means. A home field advantage means that you have not necessarily a point advantage but you have an emotional advantage, you have knowledge of the territory, you have an understanding of the environment that puts those who are not used to it at a disadvantage. Tonight I want to share with you one of the greatest home field advantages of all time when it comes to sports and you'll realize how significant that it truly was at one point.

One of the, and if you'll allow me to use the word in the context, one of the sports curses of my life is that I was born and reared in the Dallas/Fort Worth area when the Dallas Cowboys were actually good and that has "cursed me" because I can't quit being a fan even though they're not necessarily always worth cheering for. That being said, since my children have been alive, whom we know as the Dallas Cowboys, five Super Bowl rings, supposedly America's team, has only won two playoff games since my kids have been alive. How is it that an entity that was so successful, has so many records for playoff wins, division championship, how is it that an organization that saw such greatness has now barely touched mediocrity? I think one thing that we rarely address is the fact that since the "slide" has begun, they actually play on a different field than they did many years ago. In fact, many of us are familiar with that great stadium with the hole in the ceiling that they played in for so many years, Texas Stadium. But many of us have never actually been on the field. Now don't get me wrong, I never actually suited up and played on the field but because I was from the area and all kinds of opportunities that I got to experience, I've actually been on the sidelines, on the field, not during a game situation but just there as a visitor, as a tourist. And you might be surprised to discover how that original Texas Stadium was constructed. It was one of the very first truly artificial fields. It was a pioneer following what we know as the Astrodome down in Houston, and because of their great concern with the hole in the roof and drainage situations for inclement weather because obviously out in Texas it doesn't rain much but when it does, it happens all at once. They built the field in such a manner that they domed it for rain runoff. If you've ever stood on the sidelines and you look at the opponent's sidelines, if there's somebody who's on the other side of the field such as the other team and you're on one of the teams, you might be surprised that because of the extreme construction of the field, you can only see from about their navel up. That's how extreme the gradation is.

Why is that important? Because when teams who did not practice there, when teams would come in the playoffs who never played a game there, they were not used to running the whole game up and downhill. You don't have the advantage, in fact, the great Hall of Fame quarterback of the Dallas Cowboys, Troy Aikman, made this statement that oftentimes when teams would come in, you would see them throw a ball to the sidelines and it would whisk itself into the stands. He said one of the unique things about Texas Stadium is, if you wanted to hit a man in the hands on an out-route, you had to throw it at his feet because of the way that everything was constructed. I've been to the new stadium as well. It doesn't quite have the same construction.

What happened? I'm not putting all the blame on a new field but we would have to give credit that they've lost their home field advantage. I know that we are right outside of Auburn University so please forgive me for using an illustration regarding University of Alabama, however, some of you may remember some years ago Alabama played a night game in Baton Rouge, LA that went into overtime. That evening the Alabama Crimson Tide beat the LSU Tigers and in the post-game interview, they asked Nick Saban what was the key to the game. He said the coin flip during overtime. They said the coin flip during overtime? He said absolutely. He said I told the guys I don't care what happens, do not go into the student section. We'll never win the game going into the student section. It's the home field advantage. The noise is so extreme in that area even the highest caliber players cannot hear the plays called.

We could give a thousand illustrations not just about sports but about business and such. We know what it's like to have home field advantage, you have insight other people don't have, you have momentum that others possess. You know, in this land the church used to have home field advantage, it used to be that it wasn't when somebody moved in the community if they were going to go to church, it was which one would they go to. It used to be that when somebody came and knocked on your door, you welcomed a conversation about the things of God, not so much anymore. In fact, if you've lived life long enough, you understand that it's a whole different "field," is it not? The field has changed. We, the church, used to have an advantage, now I would state that when it comes to the gospel, much the opposite.

This reality leads to a realization that we need to return to our missional roots. You do realize that hundreds of years ago we did not possess the advantage, in fact, statistically when you go back prior to what we know as the Great Awakenings and the great revival movements, it was but a very small percentage that were believers in Jesus Christ but it was a missional attitude, a missional mentality, seeing the land before them as if the land across the sea as the mission field.

I want to read a statement to you regarding this mission mentality. It says missional means that I, though living in the West, take the posture of a missionary. A missional church, a missional person focuses as much or more outside its fellowship and thus outside the walls of the building as it does on the inside. Let me extrapolate a little bit. To have a missional mentality means to be less concerned with what I want and to be more concerned with what they need. I'm going to repeat that. To be less concerned with an "I want" and more concerned with what they need.

Some years ago, a couple of individuals wrote a book entitled "Comeback Churches." It's an incredible study. It's really a microcosm of congregations throughout what we know as the United States who had experienced incredible times of not just plateau but decline, that they lost the home field advantage in their own backyard. They used to be churches that were thriving and growing in influence and in impacting, the gospel was going forth in all kinds of avenues, but they found themselves very quickly on the opposite side of momentum. They found themselves not only losing individuals, losing influence and losing impact.

In this study, they looked at a couple of dozen churches that actually saw it reversed. Why is this critical for tonight's study? Because this isn't about a local church, this is about us, the church of Jesus Christ in our culture. We as a whole have become what these local congregations had become in specific, and there were actually three qualities that they discovered that each one of these "comeback churches" possessed and if we, the church of Jesus Christ, in our culture will embrace that it's not so much important as what I want but what they need, and we see our backyard as the mission field, we might just see the gospel take root to where what we know as "home field advantage" might actually return.

What's the first aspect? They saw that these believers became incarnational. Now we know the word "incarnation" from what we know as the Christmas story. God dwelling among us. We call Jesus the Incarnation, the Incarnate Word. What does it mean to be incarnational? Let me warn you in advance these statements are not easy to swallow. Missional churches are entrenched in their communities, they're not focused on their facilities but on a living demonstrating and offering a biblical community to a lost world. Again, not so much as concerned that they will mess up our building as much as it is they will come into our building.

One of the great missional studies of days gone by, and when I say days gone by I'm not talking hundreds of years ago, I'm talking a couple of decades ago, there was a young lady by the name of Jo Shetler. She was a missionary to what we know as the outskirts of the islands of the Philippines. Now I realize we're talking about the US, I realize we're talking about our backyard but she serves as a wonderful wonderful paradigm. She went to a group of people that the gospel had not been to our knowledge ever spoken, ever preached. Her purpose and her goal was to translate the scriptures into their native tongue and to communicate the gospel message. The story of her ministry is called "And the word came with power." It was an animistic society with all kinds of sacrificing of humanity and such. What's critical and what made the difference and kind of one of the keys to her story and here's what I want you to hear, is that she discovered who kind of the tribal leader was, who was the man who all looked to, who was that key figure, and she so embraced him that he adopted her as his daughter. To be incarnate is to dwell among, to be a part of. She was so entrenched, she was so incarnated that she actually was called a member of the family. Last time I checked and I know we can humorously laugh about this, family members are those that we welcome into our home, we don't say run and hide they're at the front door. Please note a little bit of sarcasm there.

The second quality was they were indigenous. That's one of those big missional words but here's what it means, taking root in the soil of their society, reflecting appropriately their culture. Notice reflecting appropriately their culture. You and I here in our local environment have the privilege of being in a collegiate world. Now I understand that we don't always celebrate being in a college town when the students come back and buy everything off the shelves, but nonetheless we would have to admit it is wonderful to see the impact within a college setting. We have over 30,000 perspective souls who actually move to our community every single year.

That being said, you may or may not know that one of the most impactful collegiate gospel-based ministries in all of the United States is actually at Iowa State. Iowa State is exactly what you think of when you hear the name, it's in the middle of nowhere is exactly what it is. And there's actually a congregation there, the name of their congregation is The Salt Company. Now by the way, this is a shameless plug for them. They have no idea I'm sharing their story but I've heard their story firsthand and I'm going to share it with you tonight. The Salt Company at Iowa State began to just kind of look at the world around them and they realized real quickly that the environment there was one not only of degradation but one of great disappointment. Iowa State, no offense to the alumni of the Cyclones here this evening, if possible, was known for one thing: parties. It was a massive party school. Anytime you take thousands of college students, put them in the middle of a field, what do you expect is going to happen? And that's exactly what occurred.

So they made a very conscious decision those that were believers, those that were part of this local congregation decided at the beginning of every fall semester when all the students come back, all the different organizations, the Greek organizations, they all throw these parties to try to attract students to whatever their entity may be, and a group of Baptist college students made the decision, what if we partied better than anybody else? Now can I go back to the definition? Appropriately. So they decided what would it look like if they threw a bigger party? What would it look like – listen to this – if they actually threw a party that people could remember the next morning?

Some years ago, there were those that lived down the street that did not appreciate the sound that was coming from this gathering. The Salt Company had put on one of their "famous" gatherings. Law enforcement was called. The police officers descended upon the house expecting to find what they saw at every other party, those that were participating in things they had no business doing, at the age that they were doing it, at any age, and they figured that it would, shall we say, be plenty of young people departing the premises. Unbeknownst to them, they discovered there was nothing of an alcoholic nature. Everybody was fully clothed and there was not even profanity being used in the music. They reported back to the station, "There's no reason to do anything."

Some of you may or may not be familiar with the social media platform known as Twitter but a couple of years ago one of the most renowned and successful snowboarders in the United States of America attended Iowa State, went to one of these gatherings by The Salt Company and said it was the greatest party he ever went to in his life and the only one he ever remembered. Why do I share that story with you? Because they were simply being indigenous. They were demonstrating to the world they were headed down the wrong path and that you could have fun, you could enjoy the things of life without going down the road of sin. An incarnational indigenous people is willing to be a part of its community without sacrificing its beliefs, its values and its convictions.

Last but not least, it's intentional. It's one thing to talk about it, it's another thing to say we ought to, but a whole different thing to actually participate. And I'm going to give you a

statement here that for those of you as myself that may have a "Baptist background and tradition," this is not going to be easy to take. An intentional body of believers who are indigenous and incarnational, listen to this definition, in missional churches, biblical preaching, discipleship, baptism and other functions are vital and here's this word, but, but worship style, evangelistic methods, attire, service times, locations and other matters are determined by their effectiveness in a specific cultural context. Can we all say ouch at the same time? Because how many of us as believers in Jesus Christ, many not just for years but for decades we have a certain style that we most appreciate, we have a certain manner in which we deem to be the most pleasing to ourselves. How easy it is that we get trapped into the appearance of things irrespectively of the effectiveness.

Now I'm going to show you a chart that I know that you're going to look at it and think, "Okay, anybody can find anything to say, anything they want to do." You know there's an old adage about numbers, right? Numbers never lie but liars use numbers. I don't know if you've ever heard that. This is one study out of many studies that have been out there. I've been talking about this for years and nobody seems to listen to me even if the facts support it. What I have before you is a study that was done just a couple of years ago by the Gallup organization. We can all agree that they're a renowned, objective, research group. Here is what they did. They researched individuals who were unchurched. Now please hear me clearly, you know there's a difference being unchurched and lost, there's a difference, okay? You can be churched and be lost. You can be unchurched and be saved, all right? I'm not drawing that clear of a line. These are individuals who for all intents and purposes had no desire to hear the message of the gospel, to be a part of the gospel, or to even have conversations about the gospel. It just wasn't on their radar. However they began to research people who were unchurched that were either A, invited, or B, attended a local church worship service and/or event and then surveyed them what lead them to return. Why would they actually go back a second time. Why would they entertain another conversation, why would they investigate that which was proclaimed.

I want you to notice what the number 1 issue, concern or fact was: sermons or messages that were based on scripture. Why is that interesting? Because over the last 20 or 30 years we, the church, have decided that we need to be so sensitive to a lost and unchurched world, we need to dumb down the message so they'll actually show up and we discover the reverse is true. They actually want us to say what we believe and the Bible says. The number 1 reason, every study by every group is that the unchurched and the lost are more intentional to A, come, or B, return when they know that the message will be in the context and based on the truth of God's word.

I want you to notice what is last: music. I'm not here to talk about music but can we all just be a family tonight, we argue more over music than we do preaching. I didn't get an amen there. We get more upset about a specific style versus genre of music. We've had churches split. We've had congregations and family members get upset. We always talk about styles when it comes to music. Why is that important? Because those who are having those conversations about how important the style of the music is are the ones that are already saved and they're already churched, they're just upset with the ones they go to church with.

Can I share with you that the lost and dying world doesn't care the style of our music. They don't. Do you know who does? Those who are already going to heaven. The lost dying world does not care what the color of the carpet is. The lost and dying world doesn't care what time the service is. The lost and dying world doesn't care what the specific expected attire is. Do you know what a lost and dying world cares about? Do you really believe what you say the Bible says that it says? That's what a lost and dying world cares about. Now hear me clearly. I'm all for our respective positions and opinions on matters of faith and such and the expression therein, but we're talking about being missional, we're talking about being more interested in what they need than what I want.

So how is it that you and I in light of all these aspects being incarnational, indigneous, being intentional, how can we share a timeless gospel in a very timeless manner? I want to give you several attributes of our gospel message and, by the way, all these things I'm going to share with you, none of them are tainted or colored by respective style. None of them are clouded and a mix of personal preference or observation. The first is this: we must realize that the gospel message must be proclaimed with a very urgent mentality. According to Ephesians 2:1, humanity is born in their sins and they are dead in their trespasses. We are living in a world of lostness and deadness that apart from Jesus Christ will suffer the eternal consequences therein. In fact, in John 3 we love verse 16, we love the fact that, "For God so loved the world he gave his only begotten Son that whosoever believeth in him should not perish but have everlasting life." We even occasionally like verse 17, "For I came," this is what Jesus said, "I came in the world not to condemn the world but to save them." But rarely do we read verse 18, it says, "To them who do not believe, they are condemned already." We live in a world that while we fight and argue over our personal preferences is quickly being ushered into an eternal hell. In Luke 15, we love to talk about the parable of the prodigal son, it's one of our favorities, but I think we forget about the woman and the coin and the man with the sheep who were willing to turn the house upside down if it meant finding the coin. When's the last time we were willing to give up our personal preferences so that the gospel would go forth to a lost and dying world? When's the last time we were willing to say it's not what I really want but it's what they need?

We need to be regular and what I mean by regular is consistent. I'm going to share with you a series of statistics that I personally find frightening. I'm going to go back 30 years in time. Thirty years ago when we possessed home field advantage, the average person who would come to an understanding of their sin condition and confess Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior, the average person did so after hearing the gospel presented to them eight times. Eight times. Now that's an average. Some folks growing up in a Christian home, it was just a couple others, it might have been greater but on average it was about eight. By the turn of the century when we came into the 21<sup>st</sup> century, it had become 15 times. As of a few years ago before the pandemic, we are up to 22-23 times on average.

Why is that critical? Because Jesus said in John 4, "He who sows and he who reaps will rejoice together." And I think one of the most difficult things about being evangelistic,

one of the most difficult things about sharing the gospel, and I guess maybe I'm partial to this because I'm a pastor and I do it on a regular basis, is rarely am I number 23. I think we have to face the fact that sometimes when we share the gospel, we're number 5, we're number 11, we're number 16. It's frustrating, is it not? But we have lost such the home field advantage, we are such a dark world that that which is being promoted contrary to the gospel is so saturating them that I would daresay that today post-pandemic I bet that number is now north of 30.

Thirdly, obediently. Matthew 28 is the Great Commission, "Go ye into all the world." I've said from the beginning we don't have a great permission, we have a great commission.

Purposefully. One of my favorite stories in the Bible is found in Acts 27. If you're not familiar with the story, the Apostle Paul is on his way to Rome. He's on a boat, a ship to be more specific. And in the early part of chapter 27, he warns the crew, he says, "Guys, the weather is going bad. You need to take my advice. We're all going to Rome, we're not going to escape. If you would just do A, B and C, everything is going to work out." If you've read Acts 27, you know it did not work out very well, okay? They found themselves in the midst of a storm. They found themselves having to unload the cargo. It was just a disaster. Well, toward the end of that chapter, the Apostle Paul stands up and say, "All right, now that we've exhausted all efforts, would you mind listening to me one time?" And they did and at the end of that chapter, here's what the Apostle Paul says. He says, "Men, the boat that we currently are residing on is not going to survive the trip. It's not going to make it, but God has promised me that every soul on the boat will live." I love what they did in verse 40, it says they raised the biggest sail and they rammed the boat into the shore.

Why is that critical? Because we, the church, we have a bad habit of fighting and infighting over styles, over preferences, over material things when at the end of the day when the Lord returns aren't going to exist anyway. Isn't it funny we spend more time arguing over things that won't exist when Jesus comes back than the souls that will for all of eternity. To be purposeful is to say, "Do you know what? We can repaint the building." To be purposeful is to say, "We can recarpet the floor." To be purposeful is saying, "We can fix whatever has been broken."

Confidently. Acts 4, they prayed for and they received boldness. You've probably heard this before that when the gospel message is rejected, they're actually rejecting the message not the messenger. Now that's not any easier for us to accept because, quite honestly, when we're number 6 out of 23 or 30 or whatever it may be, it hurts, does it not? It hurts that they didn't listen. It hurts that we feel rejected when in fact it was the Lord himself that was rejected. With confidence knowing that it's not us, it is him.

I know it goes without saying missionally. We've studied the passages in Matthew 28, Acts 1, etc. and here tonight in Acts 8 what did Philip do? It says he went to Samaria. Can we talk about the Samaritans real briefly? You know, I think a lot of times we forget about these backgrounds in the Bible. You had Jews, you had Gentiles, you had Samaritans which were basically a blend or a hybrid of the two. Here's what's important



about Samaritans, the culture and the customs of the Samaritans did not match the customs and the cultures of the Jewish people. You do realize that an unchurched lost world doesn't see things the way that you do, they don't perceive things the way that you do, they don't have the same lens, they're not indwelt with the Holy Spirit, they're going to see it differently. And so when we're urgent, when we're bold, we have to understand that when we go to Samaria which, by the way, may be the cubicle next to you, it may be the house on your block, it may be the person down the street, it should not surprise us when they do view the world differently and see things differently.

Last but not least, it's a word that I think unfortunately has been hijacked in some manners: wholistically. I hate saying one of my favorite stories in the Bible because to be quite honest with you, they're all my favorite stories. But in Mark 5 we have the story of the demoniac, a man who was inwardly tortured and it expressed itself outwardly. According to the gospel record in Mark 5, the name of the demonic entity was named Legion which means at least 2,000. This gives multiple personality disorder a whole new definition. When you study his story, chains could not bind him, the culture could not control him. He was constantly loud, obnoxious, seeking death. He was completely out of control but when Jesus delivered him, it's one of my favorite passages in the Bible. Remember what it said about him? He was seated, he was clothed, and he was in his right mind.

Only Jesus can address all of it. Today we have a whole world that's seeking mental assistance, we have a whole world that's seeking emotional assistance, we have a whole world that's seeking physical assistance, the problem is they're not getting the answer to their spiritual depravity, their sin problem that only Jesus can address. And the story in Mark 5 communicates to us, yes, Jesus saves us from our sin, yes, he redeems us, yes, he reconciles us, but the aftereffects of that rather than having the spirit of disobedience, we now have the Spirit of God, rather than championing death, we champion life, rather than championing destruction, we champion reconciliation. When the spiritual is addressed, then the mental, the emotional and the physical can follow shortly behind.

You and I today live in a culture where the mission field is no longer just "over there," it's here and if you were to go on a short-term mission trip or go on a long-term mission trip, you would be very strategic about those days you would spend there. I'm just encouraging that you and I would be just as strategic here as we would be there.