

Community on Mission

[Proposition: The Christian community has been chosen by God to demonstrate and declare the Gospel to the nations.]

Introduction

On the first page of Oz Guinness's now classic book, *The Call*,¹ he tells the following story. A prominent businessman came up to speak with him at a conference near Oxford University saying:

As you know, I have been very fortunate in my career and I've made a lot of money—far more than I ever dreamed of, far more than I could ever spend, far more than my family needs.

As he spoke the man was holding back tears. The man went on:

To be honest, one of my motives for making so much money was simple—to have the money to hire people to do what I don't like doing. But there's one thing I've never been able to hire anyone to do for me: find my own sense of purpose and fulfillment. I'd give anything to discover that.

Guinness says:

In more than thirty years of public speaking and in countless conversations around the world, I have heard that issue come up more than any other.... Our passion is to know that we are fulfilling the purpose for which we are here on the earth.

The chances are good that you can relate to that passion, to that question, "What is my purpose?" The argument of *The Call* is that whatever our vocation—it is the call of Christ, the purpose of God, which can infuse and empower us with the deepest purpose. God's purpose for Christians, and for the Christian community is what God means to teach us about through our Scripture passage.

**The Christian community has been chosen by God
to demonstrate and declare the Gospel to the nations.**

I. If you are a believer in Christ, you have been chosen by God for God's own purposes.

You can see this in v. 9 where it says,

¹ Oz Guinness, *The Call*, (Nashville, TN: Word Publishing, 2003), p. 1.

*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.***

A. Election is the gracious choice of God to save sinners.

Peter begins with the Gospel; he calls these believers “a chosen race.” He refers to the doctrine of election—that before the foundation of the world God set his love on people, chose them for everlasting life and in the fullness of time, accomplished their salvation in the cross and resurrection of his Son Jesus.

In the second half of v. 9: we see that God has “called [us] out of darkness into marvelous light.” God’s choice in eternity is applied in history as the Holy Spirit brings people to faith in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Just as God chose and called Israel’s father Abraham out Ur, so God has chosen the church and called his elect out of darkness into the light of his salvation and glory. All who believe in Jesus, who are “in Christ,” can be spoken of as one new man, or one new race.

B. By God’s mercy we are brought into his own people.

Those who are called, Peter goes on in v. 10, are called not because of their merit but because of God’s mercy:

¹⁰ Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.

Every person by nature and choice is guilty, unclean, and estranged from God because of sin. We deserve God’s judgment, exclusion, and wrath. But God has extended us mercy—compassion—in Jesus Christ who bore our sins in his body on the tree (2:24). God has “caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead” (1:3).²

Peter is stating in his own way what saw in the first week of this series. Real Christian community is built on Christ and all who believe in him are included in that community. No earthly division or distinction can disrupt that community, and we must build our expressions and experiences of Christian community on Christ.

As we marvel at God’s grace and love displayed in the cross and resurrection of Jesus, there is a common tendency to look at our lives and primarily see what God has saved us from and not what he has saved us for. That salvation is wonderful, and it is also true that

² Peter tells us that through God’s mighty acts in the Gospel, God has fulfilled his message to the prophet in Hosea 2:23, given centuries before this letter was written,

*23 and I will sow her for myself in the land.
And I will have mercy on No Mercy,
and I will say to Not My People, ‘You are my people’;
and he shall say, ‘You are my God.’”*

As Israel languished in exile in Babylon, so all of us were enslaved to sin, but have been rescued by God’s mercy. Now, all who believe in Christ are members of God’s chosen, called, rescued people.

C. We are saved for God's purposes

Look again at v. 9:

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.

In this verse Peter combines two OT passages, emphasizing that the church is the fulfillment of God's promises in the OT. But what I want us to see is how in both cases, the OT passages themselves point to God saving his people to then deploy them for his purpose in the world.

Look at Isaiah 43:20-21. See if you notice the language Peter has borrowed:

*²⁰ The wild beasts will honor me,
the jackals and the ostriches,
for I give water in the wilderness,
rivers in the desert,
to give drink to my chosen people,
²¹ the people whom I formed for myself
that they might declare my praise.*

Isaiah prophesied to Israel concerning exile in Babylon and assured them that God would care for them and ultimately deliver them from their exile. They are his chosen people, whom he formed for himself—that they might declare his praise. ***There is a purpose attached to the rescue God promises.***

Peter also uses the language of Exodus 19:5-6. God redeemed Israel, rescued them from slavery in Egypt and brought them Mt. Sinai to covenant with them:

⁵ Now therefore, if you will indeed obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession among all peoples, for all the earth is mine; 6 and you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.' These are the words that you shall speak to the people of Israel."

Israel was to be a kingdom of priests, reflecting God's glory to the nations. They did this by their different way of life, living under God's Law as a "holy nation." **They are redeemed out of Israel to be in relationship to God, and to be a missional people in the midst of the nations.**

Peter uses these OT passage to show the pattern of God's mighty acts in the world has always been to choose and redeem a people who then live out his mission in the world. That reality is fulfilled in Jesus's people. The purpose that God had for Israel has been transformed and reapplied to the community of Christ—those who have faith in Christ. We have not just been saved from sin and hell, we have been saved into a people that lives for God's purposes in the world.

In his book *The Mission of God's People*, scholar Christopher Wright uses the following story to illustrate the connection between election and mission.

It is as if a group of trapped cave explorers choose one of their number to squeeze through a narrow flooded passage to get out to the surface and call for help. The point of the choice is not so that she alone gets saved, but that she is able to bring help and equipment to ensure the rest get rescued. "Election" in such a case is an instrumental choice of one for the sake of many.³

If you are a believer in Christ, you have been chosen by God for God's own purposes.

And Peter gives us the two expressions of God's purpose. First,

II. The Christian community is chosen by God to proclaim his excellencies.

We've already seen v. 9:

*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.***

The purpose of God's choosing, redeeming, and creating a people in Christ is so that they would proclaim his excellencies. Christian community has a missional purpose, and here Peter highlights the verbal aspect of the church's mission. We are called to proclaim to the world the excellencies of God.

A. The Christian Community PROCLAIMS his excellencies.

Notice the word Peter uses there: proclaim. This includes preaching and evangelism, but I think it has more to do with our convictions than the specific context. We called to speak the Good News of Jesus with authority. In our time, we are prone to fear and indecision, but the picture we see in Scripture is that the Apostles and the early church spoke the message of the Good News with boldness. They rejoiced in the rejection we fear, and embraced the danger of announcing to the world that Jesus is Lord.

B. The Christian Community proclaims his EXCELLENCIES.

The word "excellencies" tells us the content of our proclamation. We proclaim the praise of God for his mighty acts—he brought us out of darkness into marvelous light.

We announce the Good News: That Jesus Christ paid the penalty of human sin on the cross and was raised again on the third day in a glorious body. He has rescued us from sin, death, and the devil. He lives and reigns as Lord over all and will return to judge and establish his Kingdom. Only through faith in him can anyone be saved and brought into his Kingdom. This is not up for debate—it is authoritative and true.

³ Christopher J. H. Wright, *The Mission of God's People* (Zondervan, 2010), p. 72;

C. The Christian COMMUNITY proclaims his excellencies.

This role of proclaiming the excellencies is given to the community of Christians as a whole. All those words: race, priesthood, nation, and people are collective nouns. It is true that we are individually called to this purpose, but the emphasis here would seem to be the way we work together to proclaim the mighty acts of God, and how that purpose shapes what we do as a community of believer.

One simple application of this might be that whenever possible we should resist our tendency to take a lone ranger approach to evangelism. In the Scriptures the proclamation of the Gospel is almost always done in pairs or groups. Jesus calls two brothers, James and John, as his first disciples to be fishers of men. Later Jesus sends the Disciples out two by two to proclaim the Good News of the Kingdom. Peter stands up from the midst of the disciples on Pentecost and proclaims the Gospel. Paul always has a close partner or partners in his Gospel ministry.

Another application would be as we do small groups together, and as, Lord willing, some more of you step forward to start new groups, those groups make this purpose of proclaiming the Gospel to the world as central to their expression and experience of community as is fellowship and Bible study. **How could your group proclaim the Good News of Jesus? How could you work to support one another as you go into your own homes and workplaces with this life changing message?**

Illustration:

For several years Elliot Clark was a church planter in a closed Muslim country where being a missionary is illegal. In his book, *Evangelism as Exiles*, he tells the story of Meryem a 17-year-old convert who had been a Christian only a few months. One day she texted him asking for prayer: She was being threatened with expulsion, public shaming, and being charged with “missionary activity” for an encounter earlier that day in class.

Her teacher had been lecturing on Christianity. He said Christians worship three Gods, that Christians are guilty of shirk (the worst sin in Islam) because they worship Jesus, and that the Gospels are corrupt and contradictory. Meryem raised her hand and asked if she could respond, because she had actually read the Bible, and that Christians didn’t believe as the teacher described.

In this case, she was the only Christian there, but she defended the Gospel with authority. Christians worship one God, the Gospels are complementary not contradictory accounts of Jesus who fulfills the OT prophecies which Muslims claim to believe. She had been waiting for this opportunity—and it wasn’t a safe or convenient one—and she gladly took it.⁴

We must look for opportunities, be ready to support one another, and let our mission shape our expressions of community because **Christian community is chosen by God to declare the Good News proclaim his excellencies.**

And there is a second part of God’s purpose for the church:

⁴ Elliot Clark, *Evangelism as Exiles*, (The Gospel Coalition, 2019), p. 87-89.

III. The Christian community is chosen by God to demonstrate the Gospel in their way of life.

One way this happens is, that

A. The Christian Community demonstrates the Gospel by living differently from the world.

You can see this as we look at v. 11, Peter says:

¹¹ Beloved, I urge you as sojourners and exiles to abstain from the passions of the flesh, which wage war against your soul.

Peter exhorts us to embrace our identity as sojourners and exiles and live by the values of another kingdom, by what we called last week “heaven’s values.” We have a different ethical standard patterned after the life of Jesus and not our own wants and desires. We saw last week how crucial community is to support us as we seek to live as exiles in this world.

The motivation in this verse is your own spiritual health and wellbeing. The Christian community doesn’t live by the passions of the flesh because they wage war against us.

The other way

B. The Christian Community demonstrates the Gospel... by doing good deeds so God is glorified.

In v. 12, Peter says:

¹² Keep your conduct among the Gentiles honorable, so that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation.

The motivation for doing good deeds in this verse is that Gentiles (unbelievers) might see them and come to glorify God. Peter imagines the day of the coming of Jesus, and on that day, Gentiles giving God glory because of the witness of Christians and their righteous way of life. Peter shows that our conduct can be part of being people won to faith (cf. 3:1).

As he writes these words, Peter must be remembering hearing Jesus’s sermon on the mount where Jesus said the same thing:

¹⁶ ...let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.

As we seek to live out the Sermon on the Mount, the values of Jesus’s kingdom, it may be that the world takes note. Sometimes as opposition, but God might also use our good deeds as a means of softening hearts and opening people up to the message of the Gospel.

Illustration:

This week I remembered story of what demonstrating and declaring the Gospel looks like for one “missional community.” (An MC is essentially what we could

call a group but one that has a specific people or place as its mission.) As this group began to pray and look for a people or place to serve, they got the opportunity to serve a football team at the local under resourced high school where many of the players were from broken homes. They began with helping fix up their locker room, helping set up a fundraiser, and rooting for students who had no one else in the stands on Friday nights. Before long there were opportunities to help with rides, financial needs, prom, college applications, and mentoring young men. All the while there were opportunities to proclaim the good news of Jesus, and to witness young people come to faith.⁵

Maybe demonstrating and declaring the Gospel would look different for your group.

- You might invite your neighbors along with the folks in your group to a BBQ where they can make connections and build trust which leads to opportunities for serving those neighbors and declaring the Gospel.
- Maybe there is a more tangible need in your neighborhood.
- Maybe you are all passionate about engaging the same justice issue like our Foster & Adoption group.

Whatever it is, part of our Life Together is finding ways to demonstrate and declare the Good News of Jesus.

I encourage you to find a group so that we can be on mission together. And, some of you need to take a step of faith and be willing to start new groups and figure out how live out God's purpose of proclaiming his excellencies and doing good so others with glorify Him.

Conclusion:

Thankfully, neither the salvation God offers, nor our ability to succeed on God's mission ultimately depends on us. It happens by God's power and grace, and comes to us through faith. We have to repent and trust him. Repent, yes of the passions of our flesh, but also of following our purposes and rejecting his. And trust that through the Gospel you are forgiven, brought into God's own people, and given the most wonderful and enduring purpose: to demonstrate and declare the Good News of Jesus. Amen.

⁵ Jeff Vanderstelt, *Saturate*, (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2015), ch. 17.