

The Rev. Billy Cervený:

Father, I thank you for the gift of your word. I thank you that through it you speak to us. You open the eyes of our heart, your Holy Spirit moves, and we understand who you are, why you came as in Christ, and why we are redeemed, Lord, for what purposes,

and that through your word we can cut with the grain of your will. Lord, I thank you that you are who you say you are. Give us the grace to believe that is true. We pray this in your name, Jesus. Amen. Have a seat. How are we today? Doing all right? Good. I love a good underdog story, don't you? You do because you're all Jaguars fans, and if you didn't, you would have burst into flames a long time ago. I love it. The other day I was reading this story about a guy by the name Harlan, and Harlan was born in 1890 in Indiana, and he was very poor. When his father, when he was six years old, his father passed away, and his mother went to work to support his family, and she worked in a cannery, and that left him to take care of his two siblings. He had a younger brother and a younger sister, and he had to cook for them and clean for them, and it was so desperate. By the time he was in seventh grade, he dropped out of school, and he went to work, and he had all kinds of jobs. He worked as a farmhand, as a streetcar conductor. He worked as a fireman at the railroad. He sold insurance. He sold car tires. He even became a lawyer through a correspondence where you would write your tests and mail them in. He never quit, and eventually he moved down to Corbin, Kentucky, where he took over a shell station, like a gas station, and it was right where the main state road went through, and people would stop to get gas because it was the only spot in the middle of Kentucky, and he had this little kitchen in the back, and he figured, "I could make some extra money here." So he had this fryer that he dusted off, and he started frying chicken for these people, and it got pretty good, and he became this stop for people cutting on their way through the state of Kentucky, and all of a sudden, the interstate, the federal highway commission came in, and they started to build the interstates, and the state road was shut down, and he went out of business. He was 67 years old. He was living in his car. He had a \$105 Social Security check, and no clue what to do, but there was something that drove him, and so he began to drive town to town, age 67, and he began to speak to these people that owned these

little restaurants, and he said, "I want to give you this special chicken recipe I have."

And they said, "Yeah, it was great," and it caught on, and it caught on, and it caught on, and within a couple years, within a few years, he had 600 franchised chicken places. He was so successful that the state of Kentucky bestowed on him the honorary, not degree, but the honorary ranking of Colonel, and they called him Colonel Sanders. Kentucky Fried Chicken. It's crazy, and this guy, Colonel Sanders, you know him in the Mississippi string tie with the gray hair, and some people said he was sitting behind a home plate in the baseball game last night. I don't know if someone was dressed like him, but he was really famous, and people began to ask him, they said, "What kept you going, man? Like, how did you do this, that when you failed again and again and again, when you were, you know, selling tires, or you were, you know, working as a fireman at the railroad, what kept you going, living in your car?" And he said this, he says, "I think God put something in me."

God put something, he wasn't a Christian, he said, "I think God put something in me, and I couldn't rest easy until I made a go of it." I love stories like this. I love stories like, don't you? It's fun. It's a neat story. The reason I love a story like that is I connect with it, on a cellular level. I connect with this story. I'm like, "Wow, how great is that?" But my question when I was reading this the other day is, what am I connecting with in this? Because I have zero in common with Colonel Sanders. But I have everything in common with him at the same time. What am I connecting with in this? And I literally sat and I prayed about it, and I think in the words of the great theologian Colonel Sanders, he said something that really touched me. "God put something in me, and I couldn't rest until I made a go of it." And I identify with that because, you know what, I think God put something in me too. And I know he's put something in you. And all of us have this inherent sense, this thing that we can't escape, this idea that I have a purpose in my life.

There's something for which I was created. It's out there. It's either to become a thing or to do a thing or to be a thing, but I can't help and I can't escape this idea that I am driven by this sense of mission. That I'm here for a reason. And that's the same thing that was stirring in that guy.

Now of course, in me, it might not look like it did for Harlan Sanders.

Now not very few of us are going to build these chicken empires, but I can tell you what he was doing in that moment. Had very little to do with chicken, didn't it? Very little. It was about something deeper. It's really easy to ride off when we think about things like, "Ah, you know, that's just what we do. We're people. You got to work. You got to do something. You got to throw your shoulder to some plow." But I tell you, I think it goes deeper than that. I think it's spiritual.

Because everything about that vision and that sense of mission that we have, that sense of purpose, it will shape our lives. It will shape my identity. It will shape our families. And we will submit everything about who we are, what we do, who we're connected with to that sense of purpose and mission. We will. Everything we will take on that ride. So, when we say, "God put something in us," I want to know what that it is. Because that matters, don't you think? It matters that I could define what that it is. Because if I don't, here's the way this plays out. Maybe one, maybe you're kind of like Harlan Sanders and you have that, there's no quitting you. And you get up again and again and again and you've got that combination of gifts. And maybe one day you find yourself on top of the mountain that you acquire that thing. And you're going to stop there and that'll be satisfying for about a skinny minute. And you're going to look around and you're going to say, "Is that it? This pile of chicken? Is that it? Is that what all this was for?" And you're going to feel hollow. Or it can play out like this, and this is really common with young men. I sit with young men all the time and it's, they're burdened with this sense of mission. I was made for a purpose and it's so overwhelming. It's been poured into them all their life. They've been told they're going to go out and make their impact. All their, they get to that place where they stand on the threshold and it's overwhelming. And they can't figure it out. And they shut down with this sense of futility like, "I don't even know what to do. I don't even know where to start." And there's a million other ways in between. But the question is, what is that thing? And that question, what is it that God put in me? It matters. Let me tell you why it matters. For the reasons I just said, but it matters because it matters to God. Because when you open the scripture, God spills a lot of ink writing about that thing that He's put inside of us. That sense of mission,

that sense of drive, that sense of, that drives us forward. So, we're doing a sermon series right now called the Spirit Driven Life. And it's about how the Holy Spirit moves in and how it anoints us and moves us in different directions. And this week we're talking about how the Holy Spirit comes and He, and He moves us in with a sense

of mission. And today what I want to talk about is how the Holy Spirit renews our missional hearts. That thing I was just talking about here renews that and he restores our missional purpose. And I want to do this first by looking at that question. What is it that God put in us? What is that thing? Because if I want to understand what that thing is, I got to look at God first. And I turn to God and let's just start at the beginning. I open the Bible page 1 verse 1 chapter 1 of the first book of the Bible. "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth." In that moment the first breath of God breathed scripture. The Creator God explodes Himself into our purview. On to the scene with this sense of purpose, this sense of intentional mission, this idea and this goal as He speaks things into being, this design. In short what we see here is that God is on a mission. Now you don't have to scratch too many layers of paint beneath the surface. When you get into scripture you see that in everything. In fact, there's not a single page in the Bible or any encounter that you read about God or anyone that you've had personally where you don't see God on this mission, where He's moving forward with purpose, where God is moving forward to accomplish His goal. Every page of the scripture and what we realize in that moment is that God is, mission is not something that God does, mission is inherent part of God's character. He is missional. So, God expires the world into being, He speaks it into being. And in that first act what does He do? He begins and just a few lines down. He makes men in His image. That's men and women. He makes us in His image. What does that mean? We hear that a lot. Does that mean we look like God that He got His fingers and toes? No. It means that God in His creation, in His created order, He was trying to say something about Himself and He created us to embody something about what He is. And in that He gave you a special status above all creation. He made you, He made us His vice-regents.

Right? He made it so that we would represent Him and the way He likes us, that I like to say it is that we are there to transcribe God's goodness and God's character to all of the world. That mission of God was so important to Him

that all the world would reflect His glory. That when He made us and He shared His authority with us to go exercise dominion and to be fruitful and multiply and all those things that we read about that story, it was so important to Him. He hardwired that into our hearts. So that if we aren't building or being missional or feeling and embracing some sense of purpose, we are not functioning according to the way that we were designed to. That's how important it was to Him. Now you know the story. What happens? Man, things get broken, right?

Sin enters in. But the problem is, sin enters in and it severs this relationship with God, and it severs the our relationship with the world and with each other. But that missional engine that God built into our hearts, it's still firing on all cylinders. It's still driving me forward. Except now the mission that I'm on, it ain't about God's glory, is it? It's about my glory. At best it's about my glory. At best it's about building my chicken franchise or whatever my version is of that. It's about building that thing that I can finally stand up on the top of it and move the ball downfield to reach that invisible finish line or get to cross into that invisible end zone. But all the time when we get there, it's like I described earlier, wait, is this what it's about? At best that's what it's about. At worst if we are working according to our flesh, we don't just do our own agendas. We go to war with God. Because see, God's not the only one with a mission and a purpose. There's an enemy out there who's got a mission and a purpose as well. And what's his mission? To unravel the created order. To unravel what God designed in creation. And what's the first order of business that he's going to come after? You. I promise you. And if he can seduce our hearts to cooperate with his mission, man, I don't need to sell that very hard. Just turn on the news. Just turn on the news. And everything you'll see is just a celebration of those things that God set into motion in creation. Be fruitful and multiply. Man and woman. All of that stuff. And the good news is that God, even though he was on a mission, he was always on a mission. He still is. And the cool thing about God's mission is when sin came into the world, he didn't move into plan B. Like, "Alright, I guess I'll do this thing now." No, he's still doing plan A. What is he going to do? He's still going to make the world this theater that is to display his glory. And his one line of defense, the one way he's going to do it, the way he's going to live this out, is he's going to do it through people. He's going to do it through you. He's going to do it through me.

Just look at the Scripture. You see it from square one. Every book of the Bible, every poem, every, every, every historical chapter, it reflects that. See, the Bible, it's not just some disjointed collection of writings that a bunch of dudes wrote over thousands of years. And just because they had a common cultural and religious interest, they kind of packaged it together so it would make sense for them. See, the only way the Bible makes sense, and you got to hear this, lean into this. If you don't hear anything I say, lean into this. The one way the Bible makes sense is you got to read it. It is one story.

It is one story from the beginning to the end. And it's the story of a God who is on mission, that he created this world to be this display case of his glory. And we broke it. And everything about that singular story, every chapter, when God goes in Genesis 12, when he carves out his own people through Abraham, or when he gives the law and exits, or he gives the promised land to Joshua, or he establishes the throne of David, everything about it is God coming to his people and saying, "Come back to my mission. Come back to the mission for which you were created. Lock arms with me. Let's do this together."

And you read the story of Israel, and well, they were really bad at that. They were.

There's nothing in there that you can't read a page where you're just like scratching your head because you're like, "Man, they just can't get this right." They bucked God every step of the way. And at one point, it gets so bad that God is trying to get their attention. And he's trying to get their attention, and he sends this horde of locusts in in the book of Joel, and they devour the crops, and the people are devastated, and God's like, "Are you listening now?"

And then finally, the people, the prophet Joel stands up and he says, "I am a God, and I am on mission. But the mission you need to understand that I'm on is I am on a rescue mission.

And because you can't stay with it, I can, and I'm coming for you. And I'm coming for you, and I'm going to save you, and I'm going to send the Savior."

And he talks about this mysterious figure. Verse 25, it says, we just read this a minute ago, "I will restore the years that the locusts have eaten. My people will never be put to shame. I will pour out my spirit on all flesh. Your sons and daughters shall prophecy. Your old men shall dream dreams, and your young men shall see visions." You've heard this before, right? "And I will show wonders in the heavens, and it shall come to pass that everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved." He's talking about the day of the Lord that's going to be coming. Now, of course, they had no idea what he was talking about.

They just knew this sounded really good. But we live in a very different part of the story, and we know that that day of the Lord was the day that Jesus would come. And when Jesus came on this rescue mission, he broke through and stepped into history, literally. And when he climbed on the cross, and he died for our sins, and he took everything down to the grave, and he walked out of the grave on the third day or resurrected God, and he appeared before the people. And when he ascended into heaven and he sat to the right hand of the Father, what does Joel say he did? It says that he poured out his spirit. He poured out his spirit on all flesh, on his people. Those who were dead, that's you, that's me. We were made alive in Christ. Your spiritual DNA was switched out, and you are now a son of the King, a daughter of the King. That is scandalous.

We are now sons and daughters. So, what does that have to do with mission?

Here's what it has to do with mission. That when the Holy Spirit takes up residence in our hearts as Christians, we don't go on mission with God or for God. The God of mission is taking us on mission with him. He is carrying us on his mission. And let me tell you, that distinction matters big time. Let me tell you why. First, it means this. The mission work, the mission of the church, all that. It's not out there. It's not way out there. Some of you, maybe you've already done this, and maybe someday in your journey, God is going to lead you to some far distant dark continent, and you'll live in a hut, or you'll stand on some street corner proclaiming the gospel. I don't know if that's where God's going to lead you. If he's going to lead you into a soup kitchen or all, I don't know. But I'll tell you where I know he's led you now, right here. He has led you right here.

And you want to know where your mission is, you're sitting in it. It's that the people around you, community, your family, your church. Jesus said in John 20, he says, "Just as the Father sent me, I am sending you." How did God send Jesus? Every room Jesus walked in, he entered in mission.

Every room he stepped in, he made an impact. Isn't that beautiful? Okay, great. But I don't know what to do. It's like, what do I do with my hands? You ever see Talladega Nights? What do I do with my hands? Like, I don't know. The second thing you got to realize is this, to be on mission is to not create your own. It's to cooperate with God's. Someone once asked me, they said, kind of jokingly, they're like, "Hey man, what's it like as your job? Like, you're doing the Lord's work." I'm like, "Brother, I ain't doing the Lord's work. The Lord is doing the Lord's work." Well, my job is to listen for what the Holy Spirit is doing, to see where he's moving, and to agree with it. Just to agree with it, to cut with the grain of those things. How do you tell what the Holy Spirit is doing? You got to learn the sound of his voice. You got to learn what the fingerprints of Jesus look like. How do we learn that? You're doing it right now. You're sitting in these pews, you come faithfully, and we listen to sermons, and we sing worship songs, and we open the Bible, and we say our prayers, and we gather together, and we open scripture, and we try to study it, and things like that. And I'll tell you this, you ever want to know what the voice of Jesus sounds like, or the voice of the Holy Spirit, what the fingerprints of Jesus look like? Learn your Bible. Study your scriptures. It will change you. It will transform the way you see yourself, to transform the way you see this world. But here's a good little lens. The mission that God is sending you on, it's the same mission he sent Adam and Eve on. Transcribe his character to the rest of the world. Be a planting for the display of his splendor in wherever you land. If you are a plumber in this room, that doesn't mean you need to paint a giant Christian fish on the side of your van. You can do it, that's fine, or you don't need to put a Bible verse. It just means maybe you just deal honestly with people. You tell the truth, that you embody the goodness and wisdom of God as you serve faithfully in what you've been called to. If you're a parent here, you're a father, and you have children, you have a daughter or a son, what does the Father in heaven do? He pursues you, and he never stops pursuing you, especially when you don't deserve it. Never stop pursuing your kids, you're on mission, you're a part of God's mission, and he's called you

into it, he's called you to step into it. Don't let up. If you're good at making money, and a lot of you are, man, that money's not yours. The Lord has brought you to this place. Use that, be a blessing, right? Be a blessing. Use that gift to feed people who can't. I'm so bad at this stuff, right? I'm so bad at this, I think about when I reflect on these things. Yeah, I know, right? That's the cool part. Because David was a murderer and an adulterer. Moses had a stutter.

Samson had a drinking problem and had an issue with the women. The Apostle Paul had a sin that was so bad that he talked about it in Scripture, but he wouldn't even say what it is. He just called it a thorn in his flesh. You know that one was a doozy. I don't know what it was, but for centuries people have been imagining, right? God always uses broken crayons to color

beautiful pictures. Always.

Colonel Sanders in the 1970s, he found himself, he was in a revival meeting. He stumbled into a revival meeting at the Cecil Todd Revival Fire Ministries in Kentucky in Louisville. That sound awesome?

And the Lord grabbed him.

He was 77 years old. He walked the aisle, and he gave his life to Jesus.

And when Colonel Sanders was asked what that meant for him, he said, you know, I spent my whole life working so hard and I accomplished, he said he accomplished what he never thought would be possible. But when he got there, he realized it was still so empty.

When he met the Lord, he knew he was still driven. He still had this thing in him that God put in him, but he realized his mission was no longer about him, that all the failures and all the false starts and all the redirection of the world brought him to the moment for, yeah, sure, for success in that business, but was really to walk that aisle and to kneel before the Jesus and to use all the resources that he had been given to be a benefactor and to bless churches and to bless ministries and to help the less fortunate.

That is a part of that guy's story we never hear.

God worked through all of his failures, all of his detours just to bring him to that place so he could see how he was a part of the story that God was writing, a story of mission. And that is a story I know we can all relate to. Amen.