

SESSION 1



PASSION, PURPOSE AND PRIORITY

Introduction

Jesus' mission was to seek and save the lost (Luke 19:10). What greater mandate could He leave His followers than to continue His legacy? The scriptures that speak most clearly of this are undoubtedly those we have come to know as *The Great Commission*, yet throughout, the gospels sing of Jesus' intention for His people. If we only meditate on Jesus' prayer in John 17:20–26 we embrace just a glimpse of Christ's love for us and His longing for unity among believers. 'I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be as one as we are one,' He declares. Such tenderness, such passion. What honour is ours!

Righteous Father, though the world does not know you, I know you, and they know that you have sent me. I have made you known to them, and will continue to make you known in order that the love you have for me may be in them and that I myself may be in them.

John 17:25–26

If our mandate is this clear, don't we then urgently need to examine first our own priorities, and then especially those of the wider body of the Church?

Focus

The *purpose* of the Church is clear. Jesus said, 'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength. The second is this: Love your neighbour as yourself. There is no commandment greater than these' (Mark 12:30–31).

Yes, this is our purpose, both as individual human beings and as corporate Church. But if this is our *purpose* then our *priority* has to be to fully live out this 'love'.

As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love. If you obey my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have obeyed my Father's commands and remain in His love. I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete. My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you. Greater love has no-one than this that he lay down his life for his friends.

John 15: 9–13

What better way to show our love for God than by obeying Jesus' command to 'Go... spread the good news' and by loving our neighbour by making as many attempts as possible to open up the way of eternal Salvation for them. Think of it this way: When we work for a company we prioritise our actions. At one time Coca Cola's mission statement was to put a bottle of Coca Cola on the table of every household in the Western world. If you work for the company your *purpose* is Coca Cola. But within your daily work life you have different *priorities*. For example, depending on your job, you might prioritise dealing with customers above dealing with junk email. When it comes to the Christian life the biblical model seems to dictate that our *purpose* is 'to love God'. This will be done and demonstrated in many ways and have many different facets, but according to Scripture – and a whole host of respected authorities from across denominations – it quite clearly appears that our *priority* should be to preach the Gospel.

Dr Billy Graham summarises, 'I am convinced that if the church went back to its main task of preaching the Gospel and getting people converted to Christ, it would have a far greater impact on the social, moral and psychological needs of men than any other thing we could possibly do.'

If we want to change a nation, we must change the people who make up that nation. If we want to change the people who make up a nation, we must change their hearts. And if we want to change their hearts, we must plant the incorruptible seed of the Gospel in every individual. If our purpose is to love, then our priority must be to preach.

Discussion

1. In church and among the Christian community,
 - a. What priority is given to evangelism?
 - b. What else has become the priority?
 - c. Why have other things gained priority above evangelism?
2. What are the consequences of the Church losing sight of its priority in the world?
3. What changes need to be made to establish evangelism as top priority?
 - a. In your church?
 - b. In your life?
 - c. How do we keep these changes in place?
4. Why do you think the Lord Jesus put such a strong emphasis on proclaiming the Gospel?
5. Why have Christians put a stronger emphasis on other aspects of spiritual life such as social programmes, worship, etc.?

Bible Parallel

Read Genesis 6–7: The story of Noah

Even in the most extreme conditions, Noah consistently demonstrated an amazing quality of obedience, persistence and diligence. With the exception of his immediate family:

- No one in the world believed him.
- Everyone in the world mocked him.
- No one in the world confirmed a similar message from God.
- No one in the world was sympathetic to his efforts.
- Everyone in the world thought he was insane.
- No one built boats so far away from water.
- No one could imagine there could ever be enough water to drown all life.
- No one could understand how Noah would get all the animals on board.
- No one recognised his or her own wickedness.
- No one could understand a God that had this opinion of sin's penalty.
- No one could believe a God of this sort of judgment.
- No one could embrace a God this holy.

Even still, this man of God believed and trusted what God had told him for 120 years. Against all 'common sense' Noah went ahead in obedience to God and prepared an Ark to save his family and the creatures of the earth.

Further discussion and personal contemplation

Discuss the parallels between the story of Noah and the flood and the call to evangelism today.