



3. A Passion for Being a Missionary Church

(Romans 10:5-15)

Romans 10:5 Moses describes in this way the righteousness that is by the law: "The man who does these things will live by them." 6 But the righteousness that is by faith says: "Do not say in your heart, 'Who will ascend into heaven?'" (that is, to bring Christ down) 7 "or 'Who will descend into the deep?'" (that is, to bring Christ up from the dead). 8 But what does it say? "The word is near you; it is in your mouth and in your heart," that is, the word of faith we are proclaiming: 9 That if you confess with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. 10 For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved. 11 As the Scripture says, "Anyone who trusts in him will never be put to shame." 12 For there is no difference between Jew and Gentile--the same Lord is Lord of all and richly blesses all who call on him, 13 for, "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved." 14 How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them? 15 And how can they preach unless they are sent? As it is written, "How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!". 16 But not all the Israelites accepted the good news. For Isaiah says, "Lord, who has believed our message?" 17 Consequently, faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ.

As we have started this series called "Heart of Mission" we again reminded ourselves that we have a God who desires to know people individually and personally and who went to great lengths to ensure that we could find acceptance, forgiveness and eternal life because of the death of His Son the Lord Jesus Christ.

Romans 5:8 .. God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

God showed His passion for us. His love. His mercy. It's an amazing story. It's good news!

Does it excite us? As you know Michael has a huge enthusiasm for planes. In fact he gets excited every time he sees a Tornado or a helicopter or whatever. He jumps up and down and wants to try and grab our attention, whether we are interested or not. It's just a plane - but to him it's exciting.

How do we find the Good News of Jesus? Is it exciting? Or is just matter of fact that we are so familiar with it that we scarcely give it a thought, let alone like to try to grab people's attention with it.

But it is exciting news! God wants to know me and you - personally. To accept us despite our past as we come before Him recognising our failure and sin. And there are people out there that believe that they are too bad to become Christians. And they don't know that in Christ there is forgiveness and acceptance.

And we found in our first week, that just as God is a missionary God in sending His Son, so the Son sends us on a mission. It's not just for the one or two, it's a call to all His disciples - you and me. The church of God is a *missionary* church. Let's look at a few of the verses we read this morning:

14 How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them? 15 And how can they preach unless they are sent?

How do people come to hear the good news about Jesus? It isn't because angels tell them or by their conscience telling them. God only has one way by which He gets the message to men and women and that's by you and me. We're called to be missionaries.

📍 *Why do we need to be a missionary church?*

I know that my views on mission have taken some of you by surprise. In the past, mission was taken as an optional extra in churches and we have looked at that on previous occasions too. A few keen people were involved in the witness of the church whilst the majority came to worship and deal with all their issues and try to grow in the faith. Most churches existed and grew because there was a tradition of churchgoing and so the church didn't have to work very hard to get new believers because they came through the Sunday Schools and youth clubs. Everyone went to church and everyone knew something about the Christian faith however wishy washy their particular church might have been. In fact in many churches in the UK, including Baptist ones or evangelical ones, conversions outside of church families (and even in church families) has been rare in the last thirty years or so those going to glory have not been replaced by a younger generation.

One of the hardest things that Christians are having to come to terms with that the church of God is in steep decline in the UK. The decline in the Church in the last 20 years has been staggering.

Average Sunday attendance has dropped from 11.7% in 1979 to 9.9% in 1989 and 7.5% in 1998. If the trend continues, the Church will be all but wiped out of Britain in a generation. Christians in 2020 will be a smaller minority than the Muslims in the UK! Here in Swaffham, less than 300 people regularly attend church here - 5% of the town's population. There is a whole generation that have no idea what Christians stand for or have a confused understanding of what we are about.

Take a look at this chart which shows some recent trends. As you can see, people have been leaving the faith in their droves. They called the 1990s the "Decade of Evangelism" when we were going to preach the good news and bring the nation back to Christ. It barely slowed the decline. As you can see, the New Churches were the ones that actually grew as well as the Baptists. But before you cheer, all that happened was that some who left other denominations ended up in the Baptists and New Churches. Overall, the decline was steep.

Why has this happened? The reasons are complicated. But what were we, as the people of God doing? We worshipped. We argued about doctrine, we argued about what version of scripture we read, we worried about our buildings, we worried about our traditions. What use are our traditions and our buildings or even our doctrines when they don't change people's lives.

What did we sing this morning?

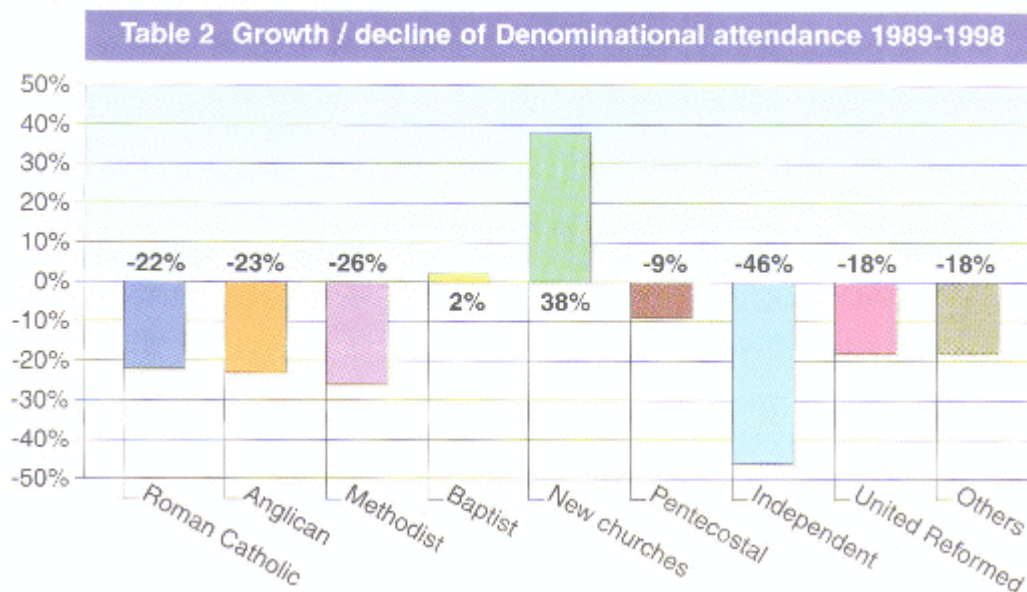
***O LORD, THE CLOUDS ARE GATHERING,
The fire of judgement burns,
How we have fallen!
O Lord, You stand appalled to see
Your laws of love so scorned,
And lives so broken.***

We see a broken world, damaged by sin, needing Christ. We see this is true of a “Christian Country”. But we’re not a Christian country.

The world looks on us and they see us as irrelevant. We have nothing much to say as far as they can see. We are just a bunch of fuddy duddies who sing strange songs. But what have we got to say when we see people’s lives torn apart by unemployment, by ill health, by drugs, by alcohol. What have we got to say to the battered wife or the single mum? What have we got to say to the youths who kick around with nothing to occupy them? What have we got to say to the family under stress? What have we to say to the lonely pensioner or to the bereaved? I’ll tell you - at the moment not a lot. People in the world look at the church and they don’t see Christ, they see deadness and irrelevance. They don’t seek Christians for their answers because they don’t see us as having any answers.

One of the things we’ve found is there are quite a few people in Swaffham who once were part of a church but left because they found church no longer relevant to them or worse, left because they were made to feel unwelcome. But that’s the past and things needn’t be like that because we have a faith that is still exciting and vibrant - and that’s the good news that people need to know. We are a people who have known the transforming power of Christ in our lives. The BU have as one of their current mottoes “Changing Lives, Transforming Communities”. The Christian faith still changes lives and transforms communities. If you don’t believe me, then go to Poland, or other places in Eastern Europe. Go to Korea. Go to Brazil. Go to Argentina.

I believe we have understood as a church that we should be welcoming, but that most of all, we are a place where people find acceptance and friendship and love. Let’s commit ourselves to continue and intensify what we do



📍 *Sharing Jesus is for everyone in a missionary church*

The call to be a missionary people is one that is made to all disciples. As a church we are called to be His witnesses. We are called to be part of God's life changing and community changing work in Swaffham. That's His mission: it should be our too. Let's remind ourselves of our passage again this morning.

13 for, "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved." 14 How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them? 15 And how can they preach unless they are sent?

But us? Everybody knows that nothing happens in Norfolk. Nothing can happen here - the graveyard of preachers and all that. If we do things in our own strength and think that we have to do all the transforming then it will be the graveyard of the church, not just preachers. It is already almost like that. Go into our villages. You'll see plenty of closed church buildings and parish churches that function once a month if you're lucky.

Then let's focus on a simple truth: *Conversion is of the Holy Spirit*

📖 *John 16:7 Unless I go away, the Counsellor will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you. 8 When he comes, he will convict the world of guilt in regard to sin and righteousness and judgement: 9 in regard to sin, because men do not believe in me; 10 in regard to righteousness, because I am going to the Father, where you can see me no longer; 11 and in regard to judgement, because the prince of this world now stands condemned.*

📖 *1 Cor 2:12 We have not received the spirit of the world but the Spirit who is from God, that we may understand what God has freely given us. This is what we speak, not in words taught us by human wisdom but in words taught by the Spirit, expressing spiritual truths in spiritual words.*

We don't do the changing of lives or the transforming of the communities. The Holy Spirit does. People are often bemused when I say this: Billy Graham has never saved anyone. There is no-one in heaven that has been put there by Billy Graham. It's true. But the Holy Spirit has used Billy Graham to bring many people to Christ. But it was the Holy Spirit that changed them.

How will they hear without a preacher? We are that missionary church called to share a message.

📍 *Missionary churches live the good news*

Just a minute. Preaching? Witnessing? Me? Personal evangelism is not my gift. In the Baptist Assembly last year we heard from a speaker called Reginaldo Krukliis. He challenged us in this way too. He has pastored a number of churches in his native Brazil and has seen huge growth. He encouraged us to be witnesses, to share the gospel. He dealt with the question - me witness - personal evangelism is not my gift. He said "Do you need to have a gift to be faithful to your wife? A bit flippant? But we don't question the Lord's command to be faithful to our marriage partner. So why should we question His command to make disciples?"

We're not all evangelists or preachers, but we are His witnesses. Being a witness means that our lives and ways stand testimony to Him. Did you know that most people become Christians because of the witness of friend or relative? Not that they

have been preached at by anyone. It's just that their lives and their words have appealed. People have seen something in a Christian that they haven't got and want.

In all surveys of new Christians, "friendship" is the most common source of new Christians - by a HUGE margin. Here's a set of figures:

6% just walk in and join on their own.
10% join because the church has a good program for children, youth and adults.
6% join because the church has a good pastor.
3% join because of some special and unique need.
2% join because of the general visitation by the pastor.
7% join because of a good church school.
1% join because of a special crusade
65% join because they are invited by friends, relatives or other church members!

The next new Christians are our neighbours or your friends. Our lives, our words and our works should speak Jesus. How do people know that Jesus is alive - because by His Spirit He lives in us. Jesus wasn't just a preacher, but His live showed attractiveness and vitality - people wanted to know Him. He was always the guest at parties. His first miracle was to turn water into wine so a marriage party would not be spoilt.

His passion was for people. For being with them, for showing the vitality of His life, for helping them, by bringing the power and presence of God into their midst and then telling them the Good News.

His passion was for them. What's our passion for? People may have a passion for church, or a passion for the Baptist way, or a passion for old hymns, a passion for the Authorised Version, a passion for doctrine, a passion for this that or the other. But passion for Christ or passion for people who need Jesus - NOT ON YOUR LIFE!

We're called to be people that bring changed lives and transformed communities. It may seem a daunting task to us but by the power of the Spirit, it can happen here. It's already happening in some parts of the country.

"For the Son of God did not come into this world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved"

***Yet, O Lord, Your glorious cross shall tower
Triumphant in this land,
Evil confounding.
Through the fire Your suffering church display
The glories of her Christ:
Praises resounding! (Graham Kendrick)***

