40. The Missionary Church of a Missionary God - Review of the book of Acts

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Date: 23 May 2010

Preacher: William Philip

[0:00] The late, great preacher Dr. Martin Lloyd-Jones once said that he, I know of no greater tonic for the soul, he said, than a thorough reading of the book of Acts.

I think we would have to echo that this morning, having spent, as we have done, much time together in this marvellous book. A tonic, not only for the soul, but for the whole church also.
I can tell you that sitting through the General Assembly of our denomination this week, it is a tonic that the Church of Scotland badly needs, if what I've heard so far is anything to go by.
Although I fear that, from what I have heard, we're long past the point of tonics. It's pallet of care, I think, that our denomination needs. Everything has been to do with the tragic decline and the pathetic management of decline so far.
Well, what do you expect, where the Gospel is abandoned and drained away and scorned even? Well, all the rest is just inevitable. But I'm trying to forget about the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland this morning.
[1:09] And thank God that denominations are not the Church. And that though they may disappear and have disappeared and will disappear, Christ's Church will not disappear. And for the real Church of Christ, the book of Acts truly is, indeed, a great tonic.

And so I want to return to it this morning, just for one last time, so that we can crystallise in our minds, as a congregation, some of the lessons and challenges there are for us as a church in this book of Acts.
Now, of course, in one sense, we've said many times, Acts is unique. It tells the story of a once and for all beginning of the Church of Jesus Christ and its mission to the world.
But nevertheless, Luke is setting out very clearly patterns of ministry and mission established by the apostles, whose trajectory inevitably goes on and will go on until the Church's witness is complete and the Lord Jesus Christ himself returns in power and glory.
And Luke writes that we might have certainty. That's his stated purpose. Certainty about God's plan and purpose in the world, that the Gospel will be preached in all nations and that he will do it unhinderedly until the very end.
[2:30] And that last word of the book is left ringing in our ears, isn't it? Unhinderedly, despite the opposition in the world and despite, we've often seen in Acts, the inertia from the Church.

God will not be moulded and shaped by the Church and her many inadequacies. No, it is vice versa that must be the case. The patterns and priorities of a missionary Church are to be shaped and set by the plan and the purpose of a missionary God.
Now, it's a great encouragement, of course. God will do what he's planned and purposed to do and we can have great confidence in that. But it's also rather sobering.
God will therefore bypass and leave behind those who will not walk in step with his Spirit. Because God's work does not and cannot stand still. And so the Church can never be sitting on its laurels.
Now, there's plenty of evidence of that all through the book of Acts. We've seen how largely the Jewish people, for the most part, were set aside that the Gospel goes to the Gentiles. We've seen how the Jerusalem Church really fades out of the picture and all the initiative moves to Antioch, which becomes the great missionary hub for the future.
[3:46] And therefore, Acts is a very great book of challenge for the Church of Christ in every age, including our own. Because the certainty of God's plan and purpose for this world calls for a great clarity about the patterns and the priorities that we have in his Church.

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And in the book of Acts, Luke gives us again and again, very clearly indeed, just what the missionary church of the first century exemplified in their own convictions for mission in a pagan, hostile world.
So, as we leave this book, I want to think, by crystallizing, to think in seven things that Luke draws our attention to in a major way throughout this book.
Patterns and priorities that are clearly evident in the Church in Acts and that flow inevitably from their understanding of the plan and the purpose of our missionary God.
And I want us all to be thinking, as a congregation, and individually, too, how these things really do shape our life as a Church and our own individual life as being part of that Church.
[4:59] And as always, we need to be ready, don't we? We need to be willing to repent and to change where we don't shape up to Scripture. And we need to be encouraged and spurred on in areas where we are on the right track and make sure that we're doing those things more and more.

So then, what are the patterns and priorities we see clearly in Luke's portrait of the missionary church? Well, first of all, what we undoubtedly see is a Church that is clear on the Gospel.
We've seen how from beginning to end in Acts, there is absolute clarity in the preaching of the Apostolic Gospel. It is a witness to the Jesus of history as being the Christ, the Messiah of the Scriptures.
And the Gospel is the promise of the Scriptures fulfilled in the person of Jesus Christ. That's what Peter preached on the day of Pentecost. What Joel prophesied, he said, Jesus has fulfilled.
And what the other prophets and the Psalms prophesied, Jesus has fulfilled. He quotes Psalm 110, you remember, about the enthronement of God's King who will rule over all his enemies. That's what Paul preached in his first sermon in Acts chapter 13.
[6:14] He expounds the whole of the law and the prophets and the Psalms and he says, what God promised to the fathers, this he has fulfilled by raising Jesus. And he quotes Psalm 2, makes abundantly clear what that means, that Jesus is the ruler and the judge over every nation and over all peoples.

Again and again throughout Acts, that is the same message that's proclaimed. Just turn with me to Acts chapter 10, verses 42 and 43, because you'll find there, in these two verses, the heart of that Gospel message with extraordinary clarity.
Peter's speaking as he says to Cornelius in his household and he says that Jesus commanded us to preach to the people and to testify, verse 42, that he is the one appointed by God to be the judge of the living and the dead.
To him, all the prophets bear witness that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name. The New Testament Gospel that Jesus commanded his apostles to preach is that Jesus is the judge who will judge the living and the dead.
That's what it means to say that Jesus is risen from the dead. That's what it means to say that Jesus Christ is Lord. It means that Jesus will come again to judge the living and the dead.
[7:44] Every eye will see him. Every life will be judged by him on that date. That, says Peter, is what Jesus told us to preach in all the world.

And therefore, verse 43 says, the urgent message of the whole Old Testament must be heeded, that forgiveness of sins, that salvation from the day of judgment is found in him alone, in his name alone, as the one and only Savior.
And that's why, friends, we've seen all the way through Acts that there is an enormous, necessary negative at the heart of the apostolic preaching of the gospel. It's all through Acts, isn't it?
And it's found in just one word. Repent. What must we do? They said, after Peter's sermon on the day of Pentecost, repent, he said.
What you need is forgiveness of your sins. Turn from your wickedness, is how he put it in Acts chapter 3, verse 26. Beware not doing that, is what Paul says in chapter 13 in his preaching, lest you be judged by God's wrath.
[8:53] Repent, said Paul to the Athenian intellectuals and philosophers. Yes, you too, you clever people too, must repent. God has overlooked your ignorance in the past, he says, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent.

Why? Because he has fixed today, says Paul, for judgment. And he has fixed the judge, the risen Lord Jesus Christ. I could go on and on and on all through Acts, but you get the point.

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There is absolute clarity throughout this preaching about what the gospel message really is. Jesus is the Christ. He is the unique and only Lord and judge of all the earth.
And therefore, he is the only saviour from that judgment. To Jesus Christ, Christ alone belong all the issues of eternity. And therefore, the church's task is to call out, indeed it is to command everyone to bow to Jesus, to repent, to turn away from sin and from idolatry and to turn to the only name under heaven by which there is salvation to be found.
Absolute clarity on the gospel message. Now compare that with the manifest confusion about the gospel today in so much of the contemporary church.
[10:22] Especially this whole notion of judgment, of the very possibility of God's wrath against sin and against the whole notion of Jesus as being the unique and only saviour among all the religions of the world.

There's great resistance to that. And therefore, there's great unwillingness to have anything at all negative in the Christian message. To call anybody to repent or to turn away from their sin and to bow to the lordship of Jesus Christ.
People want a gospel that says not leave your life of sin as Jesus said but love your life of sin and I affirm you. And friends, there are even great, great pressures among evangelical preachers and churches to downplay this whole negative that is at the heart of the gospel.
To leave it to later on. To not want to put people off hearing the message of repentance. But we need to ask ourselves, don't we, how clear are we about the biblical gospel?
Don't take my word for it. Read through again the book of Acts and see if you can possibly take it any other way and be aligned with the apostolic gospel. A church clear on the gospel.
[11:45] Secondly, a church which is missionary is, as we see in Acts, a church ceaseless in prayer. And it is so because it knows that God is a sovereign God and therefore the work of mission is wholly God's sovereign work.

The missionary church knows that without the Spirit of God at work, our work will come to nothing. And that having God's activity alone at work is a thing that will bring fruit.
Without me, you can do nothing, says Jesus. And a missionary church takes that seriously. That's why Jesus said to the apostles in Acts chapter 1 verse 4, wait for the promise of the Father. Because until the Holy Spirit came, there could be no mission. And so they waited. And as they did wait, we're told, they devoted themselves to prayer. No doubt praying for what Christ had promised. And all through Acts, that prayer is seen to be ceaseless. We saw that in Acts chapter 4 when the persecution broke out. Praying together as a church. And notice, all the way through Acts, it is corporate praying together as the church that is so emphasized.
[12:54] What did they pray? Lord, grant us to go on speaking your word with boldness while you stretch forth your hand to work wonders. It's your hand, Lord, that we need to be at work or we can do nothing.

In Acts chapter 13, it's during the church's corporate prayer that God puts his hand upon Paul and Barnabas and sends them out to that great missionary journey.
In Acts chapter 16, it says, Paul and Silas are praying in the prison that that great salvation of the jailer's family happens. And so on, all the way through Acts, we see a church that is ceaseless in prayer because it's a church not focused on themselves but focused on God and confident not in their own work but confident in God's power to work and in God's promise to work in mission.
You see, prayer keeps the focus on God and it keeps the glory for God. It means that when the church prays, God, if I can put it this way, God knows that he can work without the danger that the church will become puffed up with its own achievements because it will always be conscious God has done this in answer to prayer.
Right prayer keeps the focus on God but it also keeps the focus on our own proper work. keep us faithfully proclaiming the word they prayed and you, Lord, go on doing your sovereign work.
[14:25] Keep us doing what we should be doing. That's why Paul can write to the churches and say pray without ceasing. Not to be a church in ceaseless prayer, you see, isn't just neglectful and foolish because without him we can do nothing but it's plain disobedience to the command of God.

It grieves away the spirit of God if we're not asking him to be in our midst and therefore that's disastrous for any church. Perhaps it's this area that today is perhaps more lacking than any other in the modern church and I mean here the evangelical church, the truly professing church.

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Corporate prayer is very often greatly neglected. There is a church prayer meeting and often what you find is it's absolutely the worst attended and it's the lowest priority in the week.
And perhaps where there is corporate prayer, well, far too often the focus is inward and selfward. It's rather earth-bound. It's all about our needs and our desires and our health and all these sorts of things.
Not often is it today the kind of prayer of Acts chapter 4. Outward, visionary, mission-minded, determined to go on proclaiming in the face of suffering. In the end, it really just comes back to the first point.
[15:48] People don't pray ceaselessly because they don't grasp the gospel clearly enough. To understand the gospel truly is to be involved in mission because to be involved with God is to be involved with his plans and his priorities.

So a church that isn't committed to prayer, to real corporate missionary prayer, well, it's not a gospel church, is it? Of course, if somebody says they're a Christian, professes that faith but shows no interest in that kind of prayer, well, going by the evidence of the book of Acts, it's highly doubtful if actually they are a believer in any sense that the New Testament would recognize.
There might be somebody who says, Lord, Lord, as Jesus said there would be. Perhaps there'll be people that Jesus has to say, on the last day, I'm sorry, I never knew you. I just don't recognize your voice.
Never heard it. But our missionary church is a church centered and ceaselessly in prayer. Third, it is a church in Acts clearly centered on proclamation.
Because a prayerful church that trusts in God's sovereignty, that longs passionately for the work of God's Holy Spirit in the midst, will never be a church of passive inactivity. No, it'll rather be a church taken up constantly with its right and proper activity.
[17:17] Proclamation of that Spirit-breathed word. In Acts chapter 24, it's in answer to the prayer of the people that they are filled with the Holy Spirit and continue to speak the word of God with boldness.

Proclamation is absolutely central to the church in Acts, both in its evangelism and, notice, in its pastoral care. It's a church that proclaims constantly the whole counsel of God in Scripture, both outwardly to the world and inwardly to the church.
First, just think about its evangelism. It is, all the way through the book of Acts, teaching evangelism. That's evident on every page, but those verses that we read from chapter 17 just sum up, surely, the whole approach.
Listen again, Acts 17, verse 2. Paul went in as was his custom and on three Sabbath days he reasoned with them from the Scriptures, explaining, proving that it was necessary for Christ to suffer and rise from the dead.
This Jesus, he said, whom I proclaim to you is the Christ. And some of them were persuaded by his preaching. This was Paul's custom.
[18:35] It was his settled pattern. Weighty, serious proclamation of the Scriptures. No flippancy, no jokes, no trivialities. He reasoned from the Scriptures.

He explained. He argued convincingly. He persuaded. It was serious engagement with the minds of his heroes that went on.
And it was applying constantly the Bible's theology. It's teaching about God. And that took time. Several successive Sabbaths.
No doubt lengthy discourses. Remember last week in chapter 28 we're told that to the Jews in Rome he spoke from dawn until dusk all day. Of course today in our world that kind of idea for evangelism is just laughed out of court.
That's far, far too heavy. That's far too long. It's far too difficult. People can't possibly cope with that in a completely unchurched world. Well, it was a very unchurched world in the first century, wasn't it?
[19:41] I mean, to be clear that according to the apostolic injunctions which are plain in the epistles and the example that's equally plain here in Acts, Christ's appointed means of evangelizing is the open Scriptures.

It's as simple as that. It's the weighty opening up of the Bible's message about Jesus. That is what the Holy Spirit uses to call people to salvation.

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That's what we see all through Acts. And we're told in Acts 13, 48, that when the whole city of Antioch heard the word of God expanded to them, as many as were appointed to eternal life believed.
God does his sovereign work in his sovereignly appointed way. And we need to think about that, don't we, today?
We need to take it seriously. If we think otherwise, if we think that 21st century very clever people, we know better than God how 21st century people can be saved.
[20:46] We're not just blasphemous, we're foolish, aren't we? Of course, a church can easily fill its pews by offering entertainment or excitement or effervescence. We can create what looks like success, what looks like many apparent converts, but there's a massive eternal difference between that and people whose lives are truly changed miraculously and forever by the power of God through the genuine gospel of God.

We're made into true disciples who will stand the test of time, who will spend their lives in the Savior's service. And friends, what the book of Acts tells us is that hearts are changed and wills are bent to the obedience of Christ only when minds are forced to grapple with the great truths of the gospel as it's opened up in the richness of all the scriptures.
That's why all the way through the book of Acts as we've seen the progress of the church is described in terms of the increase of the word. The word of God continued to increase and the number of disciples multiplied greatly in Acts 6-7.
And that goes all the way through Acts. A church centered on proclamation in their evangelism. It is teaching evangelism. And centered on proclamation in their pastoring.
Pastoring is teaching pastoring. The Great Commission, remember, was not going to make converts but make disciples who are taught everything that God has commanded.
[22:24] And what we see in Acts is not mass rallies followed by random dispersal of converts, but the formation of disciples and therefore inevitably organized fellowships, churches of disciples.

Now some people like to call that planting of churches. I prefer to call it the reaping of churches. churches. Because the formation and the growth and maturity of Christians in churches is the fruit of planting the gospel in their lives.
Peter says in 1 Peter 1 that we're born again by the imperishable seed of the living and abiding word of God. It's the word that is planted and it's the church that is the fruit of that seed planted.
But it's that same word that plants the church that goes on nourishing and growing the church by shaping and feeding and equipping disciples for their lives as followers and servants of Christ.
So right from the very start we see in Acts that the people devoted themselves to the apostles teaching and fellowship. So important was that in Acts chapter 6 that a whole structure was put in place to care for people so that the apostles could focus on the word of God and on prayer because pastoring because the ongoing teaching and application of the word of God in the church is the central activity that promotes and equips a missionary church.
[23:52] That's why Paul didn't just leave churches once but revisited them again and again to teach and instruct them. That's why his priority when he leaves them for the last time to head for Jerusalem and Rome in Acts chapter 20 is to instruct the leaders to go on with his pattern of word ministry consistently teaching and expounding and applying the gospel publicly and from house to house.

And that's because, friends, real mission happens when believers live as real disciples of Jesus among their friends and their neighbours and their colleagues. And when they're equipped to live their faith and share their faith with those that they long to see coming to Christ.
That's what primary evangelism is. church. And without that, no amount of special events and special efforts and all sorts of things, no amount of that is of any value.
For a full-ord, ongoing ministry of the word of God is what bears that kind of fruit, especially in a totally unchristianized society like the first century or the twenty-first.
A church centered on proclamation, on teaching the scriptures. It was then, it needs to be now.
Fourth, we see in Acts a church constant in vision.
[25:16] Now the church's strategy is a given in every age. It comes from Jesus himself. It's there in Acts chapter 1, verse 8. The gospel is to advance to the very ends of the earth.

And although Acts tells us, yes, that the apostles fulfilled their task, reaching the ancient world, our task is exactly the same in our modern world. We're to witness, gospel witness to all nations.

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We're to proclaim the gospel, teaching disciples everything that the Lord has commanded. That's the task that must dictate the church's tactics. Therefore, we must be strategic in our thinking. Paul was certainly so. He had a great desire to go onwards and outwards, into Asia Minor, into Greece, onto Rome. We've seen Paul with a consistently big vision, haven't we?
He went about that task with all his might and with all his wits. He chose the great cities, the strategic places in which to preach the gospel. He based himself in Ephesus for two years, proclaiming the gospel of Christ.
[26:16] And as a result, the whole of the province of Asia heard the word of God. So it's right for us to dream big dreams and to seek to realize them. It's right to recognize strategic opportunities, to seize them for the gospel.

I can't help thinking that in the church today we need to be a lot more visionary, a lot more strategic in our thinking than often we are. Because we have a sovereign God. He's called us to a great task. We should expect his backing and his resources for real missionary vision, shouldn't we? Surely. You are coming to a king. Large petitions to him bring.
In that hymn of John Newton's. So we must be strategic, but at the same time, Acts teaches us also we're not to be straightjacketed by our strategy.
Also we need spontaneity. When we face surprises that change our plans. See our vision, if it's to be constant, demands also that we will be flexible.
[27:21] So Paul, for example, found himself off his track on the Via Ignatia. Do you remember? When he was having to flee from Thessalonica, off track, found himself in Berea. But what did he find in Berea?

Hadn't intended to go there, but there there was a great and eager response to the gospel. We saw it just recently when he's blown in the shipwreck to Malta. Didn't want to be there, but what did he find?
Great opportunity for the gospel. Same in Acts chapter 8, when the persecution threw the believers out of Jerusalem. Everywhere they went, in fact, they scattered the gospel and found great fruit. And so often, that's also the way through history, isn't it? Great plans changed, but then great blessing. Think of the CIM missionaries being thrown out of China in the 1950s and the calamity that seemed to be to so many.
And yet, what happened? Doors opened up all over Southeast Asia for the gospel that perhaps would never have been opened otherwise. You see, where missionary vision is really constant in a church.
[28:24] There'll be both these things. There'll be both careful strategy and carefree spontaneity for the gospel. And that means that we must plan. We must plan big. We must do everything we can to realize these plans for the gospel.

But when suddenly things change, we seize the day anyway. Because we know that God's vision is always bigger than ours. We mustn't be afraid to launch out and then have to change plans.
We mustn't be afraid of failing. We're far too afraid in this country of failing. That means we never do anything. Keep our vision constant. Have great plans and strategy.
But God will give us the way when we have to be spontaneous. That seems to be the message of the book of Acts. A church with a constant vision. First, the church committed to training.
In 2 Timothy 2, Paul instructs Timothy to pass on what he has learned from Paul to other men who will be faithful and able to teach it to others also. And that commitment to passing on leadership to the next generation and to multiplying ministry in the present generation is always there in the book of Acts.
[29:38] So in Acts chapter 11, Barnabas mentors Paul. And then together they work in Antioch training others so that by the beginning of Acts chapter 13 there are many also who are prophets and teachers in that church multiplying present ministry.

Paul and Barnabas take Mark along with them on their journeys and mentor him as a co-worker. After Paul and Barnabas separate, Paul takes Timothy and he makes him an apprentice with Paul and Silas in his ministry.
Gives him responsibility. He leaves him in Berea for a while when Paul goes on to pastor the church there. Later on he sends him ahead of Paul to Macedonia to begin a work there. He's learning on the job.

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There's Priscilla and Aquila who are trained by Paul and who then in turn mentor Apollos and send him off and he then does the same with others.
In chapter 20 we see at length how Paul trains the leaders as to what they are to be doing after he has left them in the post-apostolic church. Multiplying ministries in the present and preparing leaders for the future is an integral part of being a missionary church.
[30:46] Now notice two things about that. There's very little evidence anywhere in Acts or anywhere in the New Testament for that matter of people waiting to feel a call for ministry.

None of that at all. Paul took Timothy. We're not told if Timothy had any opinion on the matter at all. It didn't matter. It's the responsibility of the church and especially of those in leadership of the church to recognize God's gifting in individuals and to mentor them and to develop them for the ministries that are needed in the church of today and the church of tomorrow.
It's as simple as that. And secondly, notice that the training that they're given is real training in real ministry. They're plunged into doing real ministry work under the guidance of those who are in real ministry and know what real ministry is and who demonstrate what it means to rightly handle the word of truth in practice.
ministry training in the book of Acts is not sending people out of ministry away into an ivory tire of academia to learn from people who aren't doing any ministry and perhaps never have done any ministry and have no idea what real ministry is.
If you're learning to be a surgeon, you need to be standing with somebody in the operating theatre watching them doing the cutting. You need somebody teaching you who's doing it still day in, day out.
[32:11] Not some very eminent academic professor who hasn't touched a scalpel for 40 years no matter how clever he is. And yet, that has been the main training mindset for the church for several generations and it still is today.

And that's one of the reasons the church today is in such a mess. That's why by contrast, the Cornell training course is training people in real ministry. They're doing real ministry while they learn real ministry from people who are doing real ministry.
That's why a year or two years spent at the Cornell training course is worth a dozen bachelor's degrees from any seminary you care to mention. A missionary church is committed to training, real ministry training.
Sixth, a ministry church is characterized by generosity because it's received and understands the extraordinary generosity of God's grace. And that grace always inevitably overflows.
See that all through Acts chapter four where no one claimed their possessions as their own but put it all at the church's disposal. Chapter 20, Paul's own example was the very opposite of coveting, giving all the time and quoting Christ's words.
[33:32] It's better to give than to receive. It's no accident, I'm sure, that the church in Antioch was nurtured by Barnabas, a man who was noted and singled out for his great generosity and it was the church in Antioch that became a generous giving sending church, sending out into the world in mission and in mercy.

In fact, if you look at Acts chapter 11 that we read together, you'll see just how the church in Antioch exemplifies so many of the characteristics we've been noting. At its heart was a real full of teaching ministry of the word, first from Barnabas and then joined by Paul and a great many people were taught, says verse 26.
And the result was real distinctive Christian disciples. They were built up such that they were recognized by everybody to be different.
The people even gave them a new name, Christiani, Christ's ones for the first time. Alongside being built up, they were reaching out. Verse 24, many were added to the Lord and they were sending out with great generosity.
Verse 29 says they were sending out money in a mercy mission to Judea. And over in chapter 13, we read about the first sending out of missionaries, Paul and Barnabas.
[34:54] They're very best and most critical people sent out from the church, given away from the church for a mission to the world. That is a real missionary church, isn't it? Reaching out and building up and sending out.

It's very hard, isn't it, to wave goodbye to things that are very, very precious in your life. Possessions and people. But the Antioch church was characterized by generosity.

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It gave away money gladly for the Lord's people and it gave away people just as gladly for the Lord's mission. Very, very hard to give away your very best people.
But that's what a missionary church does. That was the result, notice, that word-centered ministry by Paul and Barnabas over that protracted period.
One writer has this comment, a real need is not that we should set out to make ourselves a mission-minded group, but that we should be deeply taught in the word of God. This is the root of the matter from which missionary thrust will surely always come.
[36:08] A church clear on the gospel and ceaseless in prayer. A church constant in vision and committed to training and characterized by generosity.

See, that is the fruit of the imperishable word of God implanted and nurtured and fed in a church that is centered on proclamation, on the food that is every word that comes from the mouth of God. That's the church that turned the world upside down. Because that's the pattern and these are the priorities of our missionary God.
We need to ask ourselves, don't we, as a congregation, constantly, are we being shaped by this in our ongoing church life? And where we're not, and where we're not being enough, we need to change, don't we?
It's not easy. It's far from easy for the word of God to change the church. But if it doesn't change the church, then the church will never confront the world, far less change the world.
[37:13] But it's hard. It's hard for all sorts of reasons. That's why there's one last conviction we've got to learn from the church in Acts. And it's this.

that in any church that will be a true missionary church, it must be a church with the courage to suffer.
We've seen all the way through Acts, from beginning to end, that there is opposition, both from without and also from within. Opposition comes from the world because as we saw in Acts chapter 17, the gospel always divides.
It's a double-edged sword which will always bring both rejoicing and rage. That's why a third of the whole book is taken up with Paul's stories of his trials and his imprisonments and his suffering.
But it's not just the apostles who suffer in a missionary church. The key discipling lesson that Paul and Barnabas went back to teach the churches again and again in chapter 14 verse 21 was this.
[38:18] Through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God. God. My friends, that has not changed down the centuries because people have not changed and the true gospel has not changed.

And the truth is that it's usually been in the midst of great opposition and suffering that the greatest and most effective mission of the church has taken place. It is true that the blood of the martyrs has been the seed of the church.
There will always be opposition from without. But the opposition as we've seen in Acts also often comes from within as well. From the religious establishment.
From those who ought to be on the same side as the church missionaries. Who shared the same culture and history of the scriptures with them. But it even comes sometimes from within the new evangelical communities.
We saw that with Ananias and Sapphira. We saw it with Simon Magus and so on. And friends, we need to be absolutely realistic. What that means for any missionary church today is that you can't have a missionary church without facing opposition.
[39:30] You can't reach out effectively without finding opposition without. And nor can you build a strong, solid gospel church without provoking division within.

That's because we're all sinful. And the gospel exposes sin. And where the gospel is constantly made central, it will always be exposing sin.
In the life of a congregation. In its structures. In the way it manages itself. In its traditions. In all kinds of things that become hindrances to the gospel. And in our own individual lives.
And therefore there will always be a backlash. There will always to an extent in a gospel church be divisions provoked. And departures provoked.
And the whole New Testament is absolutely plain about that. Every letter speaks in those terms. And nothing has changed. And what that means for us. Is that there will always be scars.
[40:32] If we're going to be a missionary church. And there will always be scars in our personal lives. If we're going to be missionary Christians. Some of you will know.

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Amy Carmichael of Donover. The missionary's poem. Hast thou no scars. Can he have followed far. She says. Who hast no scar. And the answer is no.
He can't have followed the Savior far. Without scars. Not if the pattern of acts is to believe. And so we need courage. To suffer for the sake of Jesus.
I'm sure that every one of us here. Who's a believer. Would love to think that our life could be like Paul's. That even in some small measure. We could live a life on this earth. That would count for eternity.
That we would be a church. That is a real missionary church. Well friends. The thing is. We can. And in fact. We are called to do precisely that.
[41:35] Acts isn't about Paul and the other apostles. It's about their God and their Lord. And therefore it's about our God and our Lord. And our calling. But you see.

As our God's plan and purpose shaped the nature of their witness then. So also. If we are to have a witness like theirs. It must shape the life.
The witness of our church also. That means there must be scars. Must be. Because we share in the work of Jesus.
And he bore scars. Scars. He bore deep wounds. By which we were healed. He died in Jerusalem. Did he not? For the sake of his church. That we might be redeemed.
And Paul knew that. And he knew that so glorious was the death of Christ. So far from it being a tragic waste of sufferings. That Paul could say.
[42:35] I also am willing. Not only to be imprisoned. But to die in Jerusalem. For the sake of the name of the Lord Jesus. See he knew friends.

Didn't he? That to suffer. For the gospel. Is to know Christ. To experience the fellowship of his sufferings. Is to see.
The power of his resurrection at work. In the world. Because. He saw that. He did see.
Great power at work. Constantly. He did see. Well may God grant us. The courage. That we also need. To be a missionary church.
Shaped by. And sharing. The life. Of our. Missionary Lord. Let's pray. Heavenly Father.
[43:31] We thank you once again. For the faithfulness of your church. through which the gospel came to us that we might be saved.

Help us, we pray, that our patterns and priorities in all our church life and in the lives of every one of us as Christian believers would be truly shaped and molded by your great plan and purpose that this earth should ring with the praise of Jesus' name to the glory of God the Father.
Amen.

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