

A True Missionary Church: 2. Guards the truth

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- [0 : 0 0] A true missionary church guards the truth. Now last week we began a series on some of the themes in these pastoral epistles.
- We began by reminding ourselves that these letters are not by any means dull manuals of church order, of course not. They are in fact packed full of real and practical missionary theology.
- They are a powerful resource for us in knowing how to be the church of Jesus Christ today. In fact, how to be the church of Jesus Christ always in any day in the last days.
- The time between our Lord's ascension to glory and his second coming. All of these are the last days according to the New Testament. And notice that I said how to be the church, not just how to be Christians.
- Because the one implies the other. There are no orphan Christians in the Bible. According to the Gospel, you certainly can't be a Christian just on your own.
- [1 : 0 7] And that's because when you are united to Christ by his justifying grace, then that means that you are united therefore to all who are also justified by his grace.
- You are in fellowship with brothers and sisters if Christ is your elder brother. And the church, if you like, is the consequence of the truth of the Gospel.
- And as we saw last time, the church is the showcase of the truth of the Gospel in this age. Remember that key text, 1 Timothy 3 verse 15. The church is the household of God.
- That is, it's the church of the living God. It's a pillar and a buttress of the truth, says Paul. An extraordinary thing, isn't it? It's a miraculous thing when you think about it.
- That the immortal, invisible God, the King of kings, the Lord of lords, who dwells in unapproachable light whom no one can see. That's what 1 Timothy 6 verse 15 says.
- [2 : 0 4] But that this God has chosen to dwell on earth and for his dwelling place to be, his church. And that is, his church is the place where this invisible God can be met, where he can be known, where he can be loved, where he can be obeyed until his return in glory, when all will see him as he truly is.
- The church, until then, is God's missionary household. And our calling is to make the invisible God visible in this world, through being a pillar and a buttress of the truth.
- And that means that we are to be a household that stands for truth, for true living in a world of falsehood and lies, but also of truth thinking. And we began last week with a particular point about true living.
- A true missionary church lives the truth, because life and doctrine go together. They're absolutely inseparable. It's not that these are two separate things held together.
- No, it's rather that the nature of true truth, Christian truth, is that by its very nature, it is life-changing truth.
- [3 : 2 2] Because it's a living word, and it's a life-giving gospel. God's word is not an academic thing.

It's a living and active thing. It's a life-giving thing. It's a life-changing power. That's what the New Testament says. And that's why the true gospel is always visible, as well as just being audible.

Because God's word is power. It's the power of God for salvation. That's why I began the series last week, looking at Titus, all about the truth that leads to godliness, health in life, a church living the truth.

Because I just wanted to make that so clear. You see, sometimes people get confused. It's easy to think, well, it's all just intellectual, all that Bible study and things. It's all just for the head, but what about the heart?

Well, no, that's all wrong. We study God's word, not just to know about God, but to know God, to know him himself.

[4 : 22] It's a personal thing. It's a powerful thing. If you're a mathematician, or you study mathematics, you do that, so that you learn about mathematics.

You assimilate information and knowledge. And the achievement, at the end of it, is education. You're educated. But it's very, very different with personal knowledge, isn't it?

With a friend, or a lover even. You study their words to you, not just so that you know about them. Well, yes, that's part of it. But through that, you get to know them.

In other words, it forms and develops a relationship. Words are so much more than mere information, when we think about it that way, relationally. You see, the words, will you marry me, are far, far more than just words, aren't they?

They convey information. Yes, of course they do. But it's much, much more than that, isn't it? It's a life-transforming word. It changes everything. I'm getting a bit sidetracked here.

[5 : 30] I'm a bit in danger of that. But Bible truth, I just want to emphasize this, Gospel truth is living truth. It's personal truth. It transforms people's lives.

It shapes us for eternity. And that's why we need to be a living church that lives the truth. A Gospel church must live the truth. Because the medium and the message go together.

Otherwise, well, if that wasn't true, God wouldn't have bothered to have a church at all, would he? Jesus would have ascended to heaven and just showered the world with tracts. That's all that we needed. But he didn't do that, did he?

He left the church. Because we communicate personal truth. And that's what the church is all about. To live the truth. To adorn the Gospel.

To authenticate the Gospel. So the Gospel of God can be seen as well as heard. But anyway, that was last week's sermon. I must not start it all over again. But we did see that the healthy life, the adorning life, does begin, doesn't it, with true teaching, with healthy doctrine.

[6 : 33] Titus 2, verse 1. But as for you, teach what is in accord with sound doctrine, or healthy doctrine. And that does bring us to tonight's theme, which is that a missionary church must, therefore, guard the truth.

That's obvious, isn't it? A healthy life flows from healthy doctrine. And a church that fails to guard the truth, a church that fails to keep the truth at the center of its life, will soon stop being a missionary church.

It's just obvious. It's simple. So first of all, I want to look at that theme and to see how important it is in these pastoral letters. This theme of the preservation of the true gospel.

What is the task that Paul is speaking about to Timothy and Titus? Well, it is preservation of the true gospel against the falsehood that will be manifest everywhere in the last days.

Let's look again at the beginning of 1 Timothy, the passage that we read together. It begins, doesn't it, with a severe warning against false doctrine in the church. Look again at verses 3 to 6.

[7 : 50] I urge you when I was going to Macedonia, remain at Ephesus that you may charge certain persons not to teach any different doctrine, nor devote themselves to myths and endless genealogies which promote speculation, rather than the stewardship from God that is by faith.

The aim of our charge is love that issues from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith. Do you see that again? The aim of true teaching is purity of heart and conscience.

It's a life of faith. But the false teaching isn't so interested in that. It swerves off into ungodliness. So Paul's charge to Timothy is to guard the truth.

Look at verse 11. Paul says that he himself is entrusted with the truth of the glorious gospel of God. But look down now to verse 18. This charge, he says, I entrust to you so that Timothy might go on waging the good warfare.

Notice again, holding faith and a good conscience, life and doctrine always together. Now look over to the passage we read at the end of chapter 6 of 1 Timothy.

[9 : 03] What's the priority? Well, it's still the same, isn't it? Guarding the truth of the gospel. Look at verses 3 and 4. If anyone teaches a different doctrine and does not agree with the sound, the healthy words of our Lord Jesus Christ and the teaching that accords with godliness, he is puffed up with conceit and understands nothing.

He's unhealthy, craving for controversy. Unhealthy as opposed to healthy, you see? But you, says Paul, you teach the truth.

Notice again, it's the truth that accords with godliness. Look at verse 11. But as for you, man of God, pursue righteousness, godliness, you see? Fight the good, fight of faith, verse 12.

Guard the truth. Look at verses 13 and 14. I charge you in the presence of God who gives life to all things and of Christ Jesus who is his testimony, who in his testimony before Pontius Pilate made the good confession to keep the commandment unstained and free from reproach.

Guard the truth. And in verse 20, it's there so explicitly, isn't it? Guard, Timothy, the deposit entrusted to you. Guard the truth at all costs, Timothy, because the future of the church depends on it.

[10 : 28] Preserve the true gospel. Just look over the page, to 2 Timothy and see how it begins in chapter 1. Look at verse 12. Once again, Paul says, I'm convinced that he, that is God, is able to guard until that day what he has entrusted to me.

God himself is guarding his precious gospel, you see? But he's going to choose to do it by entrusting it to Paul and to people like Timothy. Look at verse 14. By the Holy Spirit who dwells within us, guard the good deposit entrusted to you.

Preserve the gospel, Timothy. That's your task. You getting the message? Don't bother to look now, but if you look again later at Titus, you'll see in chapter 1 and 2 it's exactly the same emphasis.

Titus is entrusted by Paul to go on and choose other people to put his trust in who will go on likewise and teach the healthy doctrine, the true doctrine, guarding the truth.

Well, there's plenty other places if you look through these letters that you'll find exactly that emphasis. Don't look at them now, but if you go through it later on, it's a helpful thing I think to just go through letters like this and highlight in one particular colour the themes that come out so clearly again and again and you'll see that over and over and over Paul is concerned with the preservation of the truth.

[11 : 53] It's absolutely foundational to the mission of the church. Well, that's the task. We can see it as we look through the letters we see it clearer and clearer.

But why? Why is it such a vital task? Why does Paul use this strong language, this military language, fighting the good fight of faith, guarding the truth?

Was it that the truth was under extraordinary attack? Well, of course, yes it was and indeed it still is today, isn't it? It's worthwhile us remembering that the criticism and the opposition of Paul's gospel isn't new.

Many, many theologians today, many churchmen today have Paul under attack all of the time, don't they? Oh, Paul, well, yes, he perverted the gospel. Don't listen to Paul, let's just get back to Jesus.

Paul was, well, he was a misogynist, wasn't he? He was against women. He was anti-semitic. He was obsessed with sex, all of these things. We don't like Paul. But none of that's new.

[12 : 59] Far from it, right from the very beginning. Here, Paul's gospel has been under attack. People wanted to abandon Paul's gospel for something much less shameful, something less extreme, something more acceptable to society.

nothing's changed. And that's why these letters are so very relevant for us today. It was the last days then and it's the last days now.

Nothing's changed. And again and again and again, exactly the same issues face the church through the centuries. And that's why an essential priority in any missionary church, in any age, in any place, is to guard the apostolic gospel.

And that's going to involve struggle. It's going to involve grit and determination and real hardship. That's another great theme in the pastoral we'll come to. Now just think about that for a minute.

There's enormous realism here, isn't there? It implies at least two things. First, there will never be a time, will there, when the circumstances will be ideal for mission.

[14 : 11] Mission will always be done in situations where the church is battling for the truth. That's always going to be so. That should encourage us, shouldn't it, as well as rebuke us.

There's no excuse for moaning and being nostalgic. Our task is to get on out there and proclaim the gospel and battle for the truth.

And secondly, the battle for the truth will always be most acute, won't it, within the professing church. All the problems that Timothy and Titus were facing were already within the church.

If people were outside the church, they wouldn't have had any influence, would they? They wouldn't have had to bother with them. But these men, these false teachers were a danger precisely because they were inside the church and doing great damage.

And again, that's just realism for us, isn't it? There will never be a church or a denomination or anything else that doesn't have to battle for the truth. And again, we're not to be escapists, we're to be realists, just like the preacher in Ecclesiastes was telling us this morning.

[15 : 20] So, for example, in our own denomination and others like ours, there are plenty battles for the truth. Well, says Paul, that's what you should expect. Of course, to the end. Don't be naive.

Don't be naive. Timothy was ministering in churches where apparently the majority of the teachers were in the wrong, were false teachers. And they were very powerful.

That's why his task was such an important one. And you see, these letters prepare us for very similar battles today and always for that matter. We're not to despair when we see evidence of decline and decay and frank falsehood in the churches.

But rather, we are to determine to guard the truth ourselves within that, to fight the fight of faith. Well, there are many ways that the truth of the apostolic gospel is under threat, but in these letters, Paul draws attention to at least three ways in which the true gospel is at risk in a hostile culture.

And all of these are very, very relevant today. The first is that the gospel needs to be guarded against the pull of sensuality. The gospel is always under threat from a descent into worldliness, into the lure of hedonism and self-gratification.

[16 : 44] That's all through these letters, but if you look at 2 Timothy chapter 3, the first few verses, it's exceptionally clear, isn't it? Understand this, that in the last days there will come times of difficulty.

That's a bit mild. The NIV says terrible times. For people will be lovers of self, lovers of money, proud, arrogant, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, heartless, unappeasable, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not loving good, treacherous, reckless, swollen with conceit, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, having the appearance of godliness but denying its power.

well, that covers just about everything, doesn't it? And that may very well be the greatest battle currently in our own society, the battle with the gospel descending into mere worldliness.

Certainly, our society is marked by affluence, by self-preoccupation, and the natural thing to flow from that is that our people become marked by self-worship and self-serving, by idolatry.

We are a society, aren't we, of self-lovers, of pleasure seekers. Just need to go into Borders Bookshop and look at the rows and rows and racks of magazines, lifestyle magazines, all full of articles about glamorous bodies and wealth and sex.

[18 : 12] See, to look at the huge thing that the cosmetic industry is. As I said this morning, the pharmaceutical industry, not just now making huge amounts of money from curing illnesses, but increasingly marketing drugs that enhance lifestyle.

We are a culture, you see, committed to narcissism, to self-love, and therefore to self-expression. And where that is so is, if you look down to 2 Timothy 4, verse 3, it tells us plainly, people will not endure any longer healthy biblical truth.

What will they do? They will accumulate for themselves teachers who do what? Suit their own passions. Well, of course. So, the new gospel erases healthy truth about godliness and about self-control, and it substitutes instead pleasing words about affirmation and self-fulfillment.

And hey, presto, all of a sudden, the world is much, much more at home with the message of the church. Very easy to make a success of religion today. All you need is spirituality without any recourse to morality.

Something that gives people a sense of piety, a sense of spiritual feeling, a sense of the mystical, a sense of the transcendent, but doesn't in any way or shape or form interfere with the way I want to live and I want to please myself.

[19 : 45] A religion like that will be instantly popular, and it is. You'll get the celebrities, you'll get the movie stars following religions like that, and they do, do they not? But that's just what verse 5 of chapter 3 says, a form of godliness but denying its power.

The power of the true gospel to transform from worldly passions to self-control. Titus 2 verse 12 says, we looked at last week, that takes us from sin and to holiness.

That's what the power of the true gospel does. But you see, when the world doesn't want that, it's very tempting, isn't it, for the church to follow suit, to join in, to fall in line with the culture, to accept the culture.

Just think about the issue of homosexuality. You see, the media wants to try and say today, well, evangelical Christians are obsessed with matters of sexuality. Not so.

It's our world that's obsessed with sexuality and particularly it seems with homosexuality and the media it seems and our politicians too often seem to be in the grip of a powerful and a well-orchestrated lobby that brooks no opposition.

[21 : 05] Therefore, of course, we should expect to see what exactly we do see, which is the church caving in to tell people what itching is want to hear. If you listened to the radio broadcast of the service on BBC Radio 4 this morning, you would have heard an absolutely out-and-out propagation of a gay agenda from a service of mass in San Francisco.

But you see, Paul warns Timothy in 2 Timothy 4 verse 4, many will turn aside from listening to the truth and wander into myths because of the lure of sensuality.

But as for you, says Paul, guard the truth. Guard the truth from that powerful pool of descent into the world because that will always be a big threat to the truth in the church.

But second, the gospel is also under threat from the attraction of separationism from the world. In one sense, it's almost the polar opposite, isn't it? Sometimes in reaction to the hedonism of society, the opposite extreme is a great lure, the lure of asceticism, of escape from worldliness.

If you look at 1 Timothy 4 verses 1 to 5, you'll find that that is exactly what Paul is dealing with and Timothy is having to face up to in Ephesus. He talks about people who are forbidding marriage, who are rejecting certain foods, who are promoting some kind of super-spiritual religion.

[22 : 42] But notice what he says, behind that the root cause is exactly the same. It's anti-gospel, he says. In fact, it's demonic. Do you see verse 1? It's from deceitful spirits and the teachings of demons.

You see, the devil does not care how he destroys the truth of the gospel. He's just as happy to do it by luring the church out of the world as luring the church into the world.

He doesn't care. It has the same effect. And throughout the history of the church, there have been many, many groups, haven't there, that have tried to escape from the taint of this world and have been lured by extreme separationism.

It might begin with good motives, of course, but often, if not always, it ends up with strange groups with bizarre views of all sorts of things. Extreme asceticism, forbidding all kinds of things as unspiritual, whether it's marriage, as here, or certain foods, or drink, or clothes, or whatever it is.

And people end up in a kind of impoverished existence as slaves really in bondage to all kinds of legalistic codes and things like that. They may have sought to separate from the world in order to preserve the truth, but the reality is that in the end they've destroyed the true gospel just as successfully themselves.

[24 : 08] You see, that's a fundamental misunderstanding as well of what it means to be a missionary church in the last days. It totally forgets, doesn't it, that we're still in this world.

We still have to live in this world, in the days of struggle, in the days of ungodliness. It's not yet the perfect kingdom of glory that we all long for. And therefore we can't escape from reality.

It's wrong to try and do so. We're not to be of this world, of course, but Jesus hasn't removed us from the world, has he? He tells us that in John 17 very plainly.

He wants us to be in the world and for the world, not to escape from the world. And we're not to despise this world. We're not to reject God's good gifts.

Paul says here, marriage and food and all of these things, we're to receive these things, in fact, as only true believers can, with hearts full of thanksgiving to God who's given them to us.

[25 : 08] They become a holy blessing to us because they're sanctified, he says, they're made holy by the word of God and by prayer. We have the benefit of these things more than anybody else because we recognize where they come from.

It's important to say that, you know. There's still a tendency, isn't there, for many good evangelical folk to be a bit drawn to that asceticism, that negativity.

It's easy to be so horrified by the world that we want to kind of retreat and close down and live in some kind of little ghetto in a holy huddle. It's defined by our negativity and, frankly, sometimes becoming a bit bizarre in our talk, in our culture.

But, no, you don't guard the gospel that way, says Paul. In fact, more often than not, you lose it altogether. And you're left only with a powerless and an unattractive religiosity.

No, guard the truth in the world. That's our task. It's God's world for us to enjoy, to enjoy it properly and responsibly and to win it for him.

[26 : 18] And we won't win it by separating from it, by escaping from it. We must live in the real world and resist the threat to the gospel of making it irrelevant because it's unheard, because we're not there.

We've separated, and that's a real danger, always. But third, the gospel must also be guarded from the arrogance of superiority, from assent above the world of ordinary people.

What I mean by that is the sophistication and the intellectualizing of the intelligentsia that leads away from the supernatural gospel, often into rationalism.

Maybe titillating for the intellectual, the scholar, but it offers absolutely nothing of substance to the ordinary person in the street. And that, of course, has been, hasn't it, the story of so much of Western liberalism in academic theology over the last century or so.

It's contributed hugely to the decline and the death in so many churches in the older denominations like ours. It's marked by a kind of snobbery, superiority.

[27 : 28] Oh, yes, that sort of thing, that sort of fundamentalism, well, it's suitable for common uneducated people, but we're educated people.

We've moved on from that. So often I've heard it. Oh, yes, I'm very grateful for my evangelical beginnings, but of course I've studied so much more and I've moved on to maturity, to something better.

I've ascended above that simple and simplistic gospel, you know, the Billy Graham sort of stuff. And our way is a superior way. We've got all the scholarship.

We've got the wisdom of the world. Well, that liberal theology is what has decimated the church in the West over the last century.

And that kind of 19th century liberalism is just being reborn today in other forms, in pluralism. You know, the sort of thing that says, well, of course, all our modern knowledge of religions must tell us that no one religion can have it all.

[28 : 33] That's far too simplistic. All of these are paths up the same mountain to enlightenment and we must therefore learn from all of them. It's what I call thought for the day kind of faith.

Well, that's a very great temptation today, isn't it? If you're a student in the arts and the social sciences, in literature, in media, where fundamentalism has become the great enemy, hasn't it?

And of course, there's no distinction made between the kind of fundamentalism of a Muslim martyr who will kill for his doctrine and a Christian martyr who will die for their faith and for the love of others, even though these things are polar opposites.

Fundamentalism is the enemy, simplistic religion. We must rise above it to our superior version. And there's great pressure for that in a world that's intolerant of everything, intolerant of anything that isn't tolerant of everything, for that matter.

And the gospel of truth, the gospel of the one God and one mediator between God and man, Christ Jesus, well, there's great pressure against that, isn't there?

[29 : 46] It's a scandal. You'll see that in several praises through this letter, but just look at 1 Timothy 6, verse 20, just at the very end, that verse we read. It's very clear, isn't it?

Paul says to Timothy, don't go that way. Avoid irreverent babble and contradictions of what is falsely called knowledge. Why? Well, by professing that, some have swerved from the faith.

And when they do swerve from the faith, they never just swerve themselves. They take others with them to destruction. I've seen it so many times. I can name you many, many ministers of the gospel who would once call themselves evangelical men.

Far too many, alas, who have swerved away because of that kind of superiority. But Paul says, guard the truth.

preserve the true gospel against all such things that lead nowhere and are powerless. Well, it all seems pretty relevant, doesn't it, in our 21st century, don't you think?

[30 : 55] That's a desperate need today if we're going to have a missionary church. With not just a powerless form of spirituality, but with real power that lifts people out of darkness into light, that transforms people by the power of God.

And that won't happen with a gospel that's corrupted by sensuality, that just panders to the world's appetites. It won't happen by a gospel of lifeless liberalism and rationalism, that denies the uniqueness of Christ, that denies the supernatural power of God.

Nor will it happen with a church that separates itself and runs away from the world, takes refuge in cultural irrelevance and is never heard. It won't happen that way either. But it will happen where a true missionary church guards the truth of the word of God's true power in this world, so that it's seen and heard.

Well, that's the task, the what, and the reason, the why. But how? How is the truth of the gospel to be guarded in the church and for the world?

Well, Paul's very clear about that too. He tells us that you preserve the gospel as you propagate the true gospel. You guard the truth, in other words, as you pass it on.

[32 : 27] You see, preserving the gospel is about preserving a living thing, not a dead thing. So you see, the whole nature of preservation, the whole image that we need to think about doesn't come from the museum.

It comes rather from, well, from horticulture, from the greenhouse. See, in a museum you preserve dead things, don't you? You put them in glass cases, you keep them airtight and clean so they can be looked at.

But you don't preserve living things that way, do you? You preserve living organisms by propagation. So if you want to preserve rare plants, you don't just put the seeds in a box and keep them in a vault somewhere.

No. You grow them. You take cuttings. You propagate them. And the gospel can't be guarded in vacuum. You can't guard the gospel by putting Bibles into museums or even by putting them in shelves in your own house and just leaving them there.

It doesn't work. It's the dynamic propagation of reproduction that's needed to guard the gospel. A very, very key verse here is 2 Timothy chapter 2, verse 2.

[33 : 34] Just look at it, would you? It's very, very important. Paul says to Timothy, what you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses, entrust to faithful men who will be able to teach others also.

See, already we've seen propagation at work. Paul is passing on to Timothy what God has entrusted to him. And now Timothy is to entrust to others so that they too may propagate the gospel by teaching it to others.

Now, of course, here he's focusing, isn't he, primarily on passing on the gospel to those who are faithful to the gospel and also perhaps particularly gifted to be able to teach others.

It's the context of Christian leadership primarily that he's dealing with here. But that same principle is just the one that's evident everywhere through the New Testament. The gospel grows by propagation.

It's preserved by propagation. Just read through the book of Acts. The kind of language that's used tells us that. It talks about the word of God increasing. How does the word of God increase?

[34 : 42] It increases as people are converted and disciples, discipled and become followers of Jesus. That's how you guard the gospel.

You propagate it. You spread the truth now. That is, you have a priority for evangelism. And you preserve the gospel for the future, for the next generation and the next.

That is, you have a priority for training in passing on the gospel. And that's what the Bible means by the apostolic succession. That's how the gospel is preserved.

It's nothing to do with people with funny hats putting their hands on other people's heads so they can wear funny hats and be bishops. Nothing to do with that. utter nonsense. It's about the truth of the gospel cascading outwards from the church to the world.

It's about the truth of the gospel cascading down through the church, through the generations. Now, when you understand that, you see immediately, don't you, why so many churches and so many denominations have a crisis in ministry today.

[35 : 48] Why in our own denomination there are so many churches that are vacant that can't get filled? It's obvious when the truth of the gospel is lost then there's no gospel left.

There's nothing to pass on. And when that's the case, well, ministry just becomes social work. And of course, that's much better off in the hands of secular professionals.

And so the church just dies. It becomes a poor relation. No different from a social charity, but not doing it quite as well. But you see, even in churches where the truth is preserved, if there's no training, if there's no equipping of the next generation to pass it on, well, in the end, those churches also will die, won't they?

Because to preserve the gospel, you must propagate it. It doesn't grow. It doesn't increase any other way. And that's why, if a church is to be a true missionary church, it must have that twin priority to guard the truth.

It must have an evangelism strategy to spread the truth out. And it must have a training strategy so that the truth will go on. That's the only way you guard the truth of the gospel in the church.

[37 : 08] You preserve the gospel as you propagate it. You guard the truth as you pass it on. And you teach it to others that they too might teach it to others.

And if you don't do these things, you lose the gospel. It's as simple as that. I remember talking about some of these things to the vacancy committee the year before I came to be your minister.

And I said to them that these priorities, therefore, must be my priorities if I came to be the minister of this church. Because they're God's priorities and I don't have the option of changing them.

And neither do you, by the way. We don't have the option to ignore them because every church that is to be a missionary church must take these things seriously.

And the only question for us as a particular congregation here is how much responsibility do we have as this particular church in this particular place and time? How much responsibility do we have for these things?

[38 : 13] It seems to me that we have quite a big responsibility, doesn't it? To you? We have resources. There are people here in this church. And we've got money because there are people here in this church.

We have opportunities because of the unique location that God's given us right at the heart of this Scotland's largest city. And we have a heritage, don't we? We have had the true gospel preserved in this place.

And therefore, we must do what God has given us to do. We must guard the gospel and seek to propagate it in Glasgow and beyond.

We must develop our strategy for evangelism right in the center of this city, mustn't we? We must resource it and we must expand it and we must pray for it. Not least among the many visitors, the many overseas students and others that come here.

That's what Christianity explored and all these other courses we do is all about, isn't it? And we must develop training, especially focused at the many young students and young workers who spend two or three years here with us in Glasgow and then go on to other churches, to other countries, conserve the Lord all over the place.

[39 : 27] That's what release the word is all about, for example. Guarding the truth for the church's future by entrusting it to others who will be able to teach it to still others. It's exactly the same for Tron Youth on a Friday night.

That's what we're doing. Guarding the truth to pass it on to the next generation. That's what Cornhill Scotland too is all about in a more specialist way. Seeking to single out and to equip those who perhaps have particular gifts to propagate the truth in leadership in the future.

Now don't misunderstand me. I'm not saying at all that these are the only things of importance. Of course not. That would be ridiculous. There are a host of other ways in the life of our church here that we propagate the gospel.

Too many for me to mention. But I single out these particular things because I believe them to be our particular responsibilities in a congregation like ours.

A congregation in the city centre where God has placed us, where he's given us opportunities, where he's given us numbers of young people just as other churches in similar situations bear the same responsibilities.

[40 : 35] And that's, friends, a responsibility that we all have. It doesn't matter what age we are or how long or how short we've been in this church. It's a responsibility we all have to play our part in a real missionary church that guards the truth.

Not all of us, of course, will be involved in particular ways in some of these things, in Discipleship Explored or Christianity Explored or Tron Youth or Release the Word or whatever.

But as a part of our shared calling to be a missionary church here, we're all called, aren't we, to have an interest in these things, to have a burden for these things and many other things that we do besides.

To pray for them, to resource these things, to rejoice in them. that all of us can and may play our part in a true missionary church, guarding the truth by propagating it to the world and to the next generation.

That might be that you're getting older and you're much less able. It might be even that you're just listening to this on the tape because you're not even able to get out to church.

[41 : 50] And you maybe think, well, I can't do anything in all of these things. Am I useless then in this church? Well, of course not. There are some people who perhaps can't do anything other than sit in their chair.

But what they can do is pray. What some of us here, some of the younger folk in this special, need to know is that there are people who do just that many, many hours a day.

Can't even be with us in the church anymore. But their prayers, well, you have no idea how important their prayers are in the life of this missionary church. We might be never known now until the last day when all things will be revealed.

Maybe that's you. Maybe that's all you think you can do. That's a vital thing to do. And you're guarding the truth by playing your part just the same as the speaker or the table leader or the person who's cooking or the person who's washing the dishes.

You see, it's household work to guard the truth. It's for all of us if we want to be a missionary church.

[42 : 56] And we all have different roles to play. We all have different things to do but we're all involved in that same task. Whether these things I've mentioned or the 12 to 2 or the 2 to 4 rota or the making sure course or a ladies bible study or home studies or one to one mentoring or whatever it might be the parish evangelism team hundreds of other things.

In all these ways whether they're general things that would take place in any church or whether specific things particular to our church here in St. George's Tron in all of these ways we are guarding the truth as we pass it on as we keep it alive by propagation person to person and generation to generation.

A true missionary church guards the truth. It must. It preserves the gospel by propagating it. No other way. There is no other way.

And it propagates the gospel as it prioritizes its evangelism strategy and its training strategy. entrusting what we have learned into the hands of others that they too might pass it on.

So I want to encourage us all to encourage one another all that we can to play our part to be involved in guarding the truth that way. That's what it means you see to be a passenger not to be a passenger rather but to be a partner as Philip Jensen said in a true gospel church.

[44 : 39] So may God help us all to encourage one another to be a true missionary church guarding the truth as we propagate the truth in all these ways here in St. George's Tron.

Let's pray. Heavenly Father we thank you for those who brought us to life as they propagated the gospel to us.

We thank you for them because without them we would still be dead in our sins. We thank you for those who down the ages through trial and hardship and persecution and often martyrdom have preserved your gospel have guarded the truth and passed it on.

So as we sang earlier in that hymn about the church may we not shirk to do our part and would you help us together to have the zeal of a true missionary church for the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ and for the blessing of many in this city for we ask it in his name.

Amen. Amen.