The Church's Corporate Proclamation

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[0:00] So we come now to our Bible reading, and this morning Willie is continuing our series on the mission of the church.! Paul writes to the church in Ephesus, I, therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call. One Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all who is over all and through all and in all.
But grace was given to each one of us according to the measure of Christ's gift. Therefore, it says, When he ascended on high, he led a host of captives, and he gave gifts to men.
In saying he ascended, what does it mean but that he had also descended into the lower regions, the earth? He who descended is the one who also ascended far above all the heavens, that he might fill all things.
And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, so that we may no longer be children tossed to and fro by the waves, but carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes.
[2:29] Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped.

When each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love. Amen.
And may God bless his word to us this morning.
Well, do take your Bibles and turn with me, first of all, to the passage that we read together in Ephesians chapter 4. We will also be looking a little in a couple of other passages in Colossians chapter 4 and in 1 Corinthians 14.
We are, in these weeks, looking not at one particular part of Scripture, working our way through it as we normally do, but this is a little thematic series on the mission of the church.
And I think, if I remember right, this is our fourth study. There will be a couple more to come after a couple of weeks' time. I'm away for the next couple of weeks, but we will come back to this because we're looking together at aspects of the church's corporate mission.
[3:53] And today I want to think about the church's corporate proclamation. And in particular, the gospel message that we proclaim all together as a church, every one of us, in our lives, day to day, but also very much as we gather together corporately as a church.

I don't know if you're like me. I often find that when I read books about evangelism or when I hear talks about evangelism, it can make me feel like I'm a bit of a failure.
Some approaches to evangelism, I think, can be rather guilt-inducing because they seem to want everybody to be able to do all the things that many of us, if truth be told, just find very difficult to do and perhaps even we can't do.
And so instead of encouraging our efforts, they rather discourage us quite a lot, sometimes even completely.
But happily, I don't think the Bible is like that. In fact, it's very realistic. Let's not forget, this is one of the things we've been emphasizing in this little series, that the Great Commission was not given just to one person.

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[5:25] It wasn't given just to you or me, was it? It's not our personal task, the task of every single one of us individually to evangelize the whole globe.

Obviously, it's the task of the whole worldwide church in the train of the apostles to whom Christ spoke those words. And that's another way of saying it's a partnership, the mission of the gospel. And we're all called into it together. And even the part that we are called to in our own church, in our own part of the world, is a partnership.
Now, we've been seeing that, haven't we? I hope in this series, we're all called to prioritize together a gospel mindset. We're all called to pray together for the gospel means.
We're all called to pay together, to give the gospel money, to pay for that mission. And doing all of these things means that we're all involved collectively in that ministry of the gospel, in the mission of the gospel.
[6:36] We're all, if you like, in the supplies division of the Lord's gospel army. But it's also true that we're all called, in some measure, to the frontline task of proclaiming the gospel message.

All of us. And I want to think about that today, I hope in a way that will not discourage us, but will encourage us all, in our own ministry of proclamation of the gospel.
It won't dispirit us, but it will spur us on. And if that's to be so, then we need to recognize what our own personal role is, or should be, in proclaiming the gospel message.
And to do that, we need to recognize that in the church, there are both what we might call general offices, in which we're all called to serve, and also special offices.
In other words, recognizing that there are some people that God has particularly gifted and called very specially for the sake of the whole church, and has set them apart to serve in that way, specially for the sake of all.
[7:50] Now, it's important to think about this in the right sort of way. Sometimes we talk about people who are in full-time ministry, full-time service. But the Bible's very clear, there's no such thing as full-time or part-time service of Christ, is there?

You don't hear Jesus speaking about full-time disciples and part-time disciples. We're all called to full-time discipleship. But we're not all necessarily called, for example, to give up our secular work by which we earn our crust to live lives.
We're not all called to do that. Some people are called to do that because the church wants to particularly focus them and direct them to spend all their time doing that. So they compensate them for not being able to earn a living.
Not all of us are called to do that, but all of us are called to full-time discipleship, full-time service. And what you see in every area of life in the New Testament is that there are people who have gifts particularly for certain things.
But these are not a different category of people. It's just the same sorts of things that everybody is also to be involved in in every area of life. Whether it's serving, whether it's administration, whether it's ruling wisely, whether it's teaching well, or whatever it might be.
[9:06] All Christians, every one of us, have common responsibilities in all of these areas. But some are particularly gifted, perhaps, or set aside, particularly for those spheres of service, for the sake of the whole church.

And it is just so in the same way, I think, when we think about the gift of evangelism. And I think it's going to help us if we think about three distinct ways that God uses his people, all of his people, to proclaim the gospel message to outsiders, to those who don't yet know the Lord Jesus Christ.
So three things that the New Testament teaches us about this. And the first is this, that God does speak through gospel-centered evangelists. There are some people that God sets aside in the church and for the church who have a special gifting for the ministry of God's word in the context of evangelism, of speaking God's word to those who are not yet Christians.
I want you to look at Ephesians chapter 4, where we read, and particularly verses 11 to 13. Notice the context. We read the whole passage because the context is about the oneness of the body of Christ, of the church.
It's a real partnership together. And to enable that, as verse 7 says, Paul says, grace was given to each one. Each has a contribution to make.
[10:38] And so in order to nurture the gifts of all, all the saints, all the believers, God has given special gifts of word ministry to some for the sake of all.

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So verse 11, he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastor, the teachers. Why? To do all the work? To do all the ministry?
No. To equip the saints. That is just the Christian believers of the church. To equip all of those in the church for the work of ministry.
All the people of God in the church do the work of ministry for building the body of Christ. Christ. Now you see how evangelist is listed there among those particular people, prophets, pastors, teachers.
So they too are teachers of God's word, but it seems they have a distinct, particular focus on evangelism, that is teaching the gospel to those who are not yet believers, who are not part of the church.
[11:40] Now we could argue, and people do argue, about whether that is a distinct office in the church and so on. But honestly, the terminology I don't think really matters because the point is, Paul is telling us there are people who are specifically and particularly gifted in this way.

in the New Testament, that word evangelist is not actually very common. You tend to find it in the later letters of the New Testament. But for example, in the book of Acts, we read about Philip, the evangelist.
Do you remember? And he was obviously such a person. It wasn't his only gift because in Acts chapter 6, he's one of those who are the seven who are set aside as particularly gifted as being an able administrator.
Do you remember they had all that problem about the distribution of the food between the different groups of widows and so on? He was one of those, but he's also an evangelist. There's Epaphras who's noted in Colossians chapter 1 and verse 7.
He was the man who first evangelized, brought the gospel to the city of Colossae, founded the church there. And there's lots of others. They're often called co-workers or brothers.
[12:47] And Paul speaks of those. What he means is those who are involved with him in his missionary task of first-line evangelism. And I suspect that we all know people, or many of us will know people, who do seem to have very particular gifts in evangelism, who are particularly gifted in bringing the gospel to complete outsiders.

As sometimes in the history of the church, there have been preachers with very particular gifts like that. Some of you were hearing last Wednesday, Paul's talk about Billy Graham.
Billy Graham's almost unique in the history of the church. Certainly in recent centuries, he has probably evangelized more people than anybody in the history of the church. I don't think anyone would deny that his particular gift was preaching the gospel to unbelievers.
And we thank God for people like Billy Graham. But sometimes it's very different, isn't it? Sometimes there are people who have a very particular gift of personal one-to-one evangelism.
I know people like that. People have got an extraordinary ability to speak to somebody. Somebody perhaps they've just met for the very first time. Somebody's on the street.
[14:00] And be able to share the gospel with them in a way that is powerful and very effective. Sometimes people like that are in paid ministry by the church so that they can devote all their time to doing that.

But often it's not. Often it's people who are incredibly effective in that personal evangelism in their workplace. And actually the last thing you'd really want to do is take them out of the workplace because they have so many opportunities to share the gospel with people.
But the point is whatever the particular manifestation, there are certain people that God seems to have particularly gifted in that area of evangelism.
It almost seems what they're made for. And that means that very often there are people like that that can do things that the rest of us find much more difficult to do and much more difficult to do very effectively.
As I said, there are some people I know who can go out on Buchanan Street, go out on a busy street, Sochie Hall Street, walk up to people, total strangers, and engage them in conversation and evangelize them in an incredible way.
[15:10] Others, most people, I think, find that sort of thing really very difficult to do. Now that can be, of course, because we're embarrassed about the gospel, we're ashamed of the gospel, we don't want people to know that we're Christians.

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Well, that's a very bad thing, that's no excuse. But it can be, can't it, that by nature, by temperament, we find it just very difficult to speak to a complete stranger about anything, never mind about the gospel.
God hasn't given us that particular gift of being able to do such things. And so the church does need people with those gifts, not just to exercise those gifts themselves, but also to be able to help equip others to become better at their own personal evangelism, at their own work of ministry.
It's great when a church has people like that, when it can deploy them, perhaps even employ them. And you might, not yourself, be able to do those things in that particular way, but you can certainly pray, can't you, as the Lord Jesus asked us in Matthew chapter 9, pray for the Lord to raise up people like that among us who will be able to exercise those gifts.
And if such people arise and we're unable to perhaps set them aside for that particular ministry, we can all pay as well as pray. We can all do that. And we should be looking, I think, to ensure that people with these particular gifts are being used by God.
[16:46] We should recognize these gifts, people with a great burden to tell others about the Lord Jesus, people who have got particular gifts and relating to people who don't know Christ yet, people who are very clear on the gospel truth, mature in Christian character, and gifted in these ways.

we should be praying for the Lord to make us more like that, to raise up gifts like that among us. And when a church has people like that, I think it's right that we should be seeking to maximize their ministry, whatever that might be.
It might be by employing them so that they can do that work, so that they can teach others, so that they can have an effective ministry to equip the other saints. So don't feel a failure if you can't do all the things that some people you know can do in an evangelistic way.
It may very well be that you are not particularly gifted by God in that special way for those tasks to be the main part of your life. I think that's true for most of us.
But you can pray and you can pay. We can all do that. If we wouldn't do that, if we're not willing to pray for these gifts to be manifested among us, if we're not willing to pay for them when they arise, then that probably does actually just mean we're not that interested in the gospel and we're not that interested in evangelism.
[18:13] So don't be discouraged. We're not all evangelists in that sense of specific, special gifting for a particular ministry. But God's church are all part of that mission as we speak to others about Christ.

We're all to be gospel-centered evangelists in that general way. We are all to be those who are specifically thinking about evangelism of the church, even if our particular personal role in that is not that of the particularly gifted personal evangelist.
And that's not a let-off. We're not all necessarily called to a particular ministry like that, but we are, we are all called to our own personal ministries of gospel proclamation.
And that brings us to the second thing because God speaks also through gospel-centered daily lives. He does give all of us general opportunities to speak a word for him, just as he gives some people special and specific opportunities to speak for him.
He gives all of us general opportunities. Turn over, if you would, a few pages to the letter to Colossians. We're going to read again from Colossians chapter 4. We read some of this the other week when we were thinking about prayer.
[19:46] But in Colossians 4, verse 2, Paul says this, continue steadfastly in prayer, being watchful in it with thanksgiving. At the same time, pray also for us, that's Paul and his band of evangelists, that God may open to us a door for the word to declare the mystery of Christ on account of which I am in prison, that I may make it clear which is how I ought to speak.

Pray for the gospel word coming through us, specialist workers, as he's saying. But he goes on, verse 5, conduct yourselves wisely towards outsiders, making the best use of the time.
Let your speech, let your word, always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how you ought to answer each person.
Now notice there, we looked at that when we were thinking about praying for the proclamation of the gospel, but notice it's not just a simple partnership of Paul the apostle speaking God's words as the great evangelist and others in the church praying for him.
That's only part of it. Paul does have that particular special speaking ministry, declaring the mystery of Christ as he calls it, in frontier mission as God opens the doors.

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[21:15] But do you see how the ordinary Colossians also have their own word ministry? Do you see that? Verse 3, they're to pray for Paul to open a door for the word that he declares, but verse 6, he says, literally, let your word also be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer each person.

So they're to be ready in their daily lives. to give an answer, that is a gospel answer. And he doesn't just mean there, oh, be ready to give an answer when somebody asks you a specific question, he just means, be ready to speak a word in season for Christ whenever that opportunity arises.
Indeed, he says we have to make the most of every opportunity. That's how the NIV, if you have one of those translations, that's how it translates, make the best use of the time.
verse 5, make the most of every opportunity. And there are many opportunities, aren't there, just in ordinary daily life.
You might very well find that opportunity meets you first thing tomorrow morning at work. You go to the coffee machine or the water cooler or whatever it is and somebody will say, well, do you have a good weekend? What are you going to say?
[22:31] Yes. Put your head down. Oh yes, I was watching the football on Saturday and immediately you're into a conversation about hearts being robbed of the title and Celtic winning the league again and all the rest of it.

But you could say, yes, it was great to be at church on Sunday. And even just that one little line could open all kinds of doors for conversation, couldn't it?
Now you don't need a special gift. You do not need to have the gift of evangelism to say that, do you? It's very easy. Yes, it was great being at church on Sunday.
Practice it. Yes, it was great being at church on Sunday. Now that's just a desire, isn't it, to make the most of every opportunity, a little opportunity and a willingness to be willing to stand up for Jesus.
The old King James version, if some of you have that in verse 5, it translates verse 6 rather, so you might know an answer.
[23:47] It uses the word redeeming the time. Redeeming the time. And that implies that there's a cost to redeem is to buy back.

Maybe it means deliberately speaking about things or not speaking about other things that you could speak about.
but using that time, redeeming that time. You can say something simple, can't you? You can say, yeah, I was at church on Sunday. You might be worried, oh, what am I going to say next?
Well, you can trust God on that, I think, can't you? Or somebody might say to you in the middle of the week on Wednesday or Thursday, well, what did you do at lunchtime?
And you could just say, oh, well, I like to be out of the office and have a walk. Or you could say, well, I like to listen to my church's podcast. It's just great to have a word of sanity and truth in the middle of the week.
[24:54] It reminds me of what we were hearing about on Sunday. I couldn't do without it. It's what keeps me in life. Now, that could open up a whole load of things, couldn't it?

Or you might just say, yeah, perhaps you should come with me sometime and hear that and see what it does for you. See, that's giving an answer for the gospel, isn't it?
Even when you don't have much of a question, it's redeeming the time, it's making the most of every opportunity. Peter, actually, the apostle, says the same thing in 1 Peter 3 in verse 15.
He says, always be prepared to give a defense to anyone who asks you for the reason of the hope that is in you. Now, sometimes we are asked directly.
Sometimes we're maybe even challenged in a hostile way about what we believe. And that can be hard, can't it? But, well, there are lots of Christian books that are available to help.
[25:51] Most of the things when people do ask a specific question, most of the things they ask is on quite a small list of the same old questions. Oh, well, if there's a God, why does he allow suffering? Or why are you Christians always talking about sex?

Or what about other religions? That sort of thing. Now, there are books in our book stall downstairs or at the back that will help you with these things. And, you know, it's really worthwhile just reading some of these things and having a few of these things up your sleeve so you've got an answer.
That's making the most of every opportunity. We don't just have our books there to decorate the wall. They're actually there to be read. They're there to be helpful. There's a book down there called

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If I Could Ask God One Question.
And there's other books that are similar to that that help you so that you can make the most of every opportunity. We don't need to be fearful. Peter there when he's talking about those things he says don't fear even hostile confrontations.
Set apart in your heart Christ as Lord he's saying. In other words, fear God, fear him. When Christ is your Lord you don't need to fear anyone else. Whatever they can ask you.
[27:03] Don't be don't be cowed by questions. Don't fear. Just make the most of every opportunity. A little word here and there. Yeah, I'm listening to my church's podcast.

I find it really helps me. Why don't you have a listen? Why don't you come on Sunday even better? Those aren't terribly difficult things to say. Don't fear. But also notice Paul likewise says don't fight. Look in verse 6. Always be gracious he says. there's to be a distinct seasoning to your speaking for Jesus. The salt that brings out the full flavor of the message that we give.
See, that's important. It's not just cleverness. You can be very clever in answering people all the right answers. But it's not cleverness, it's our graciousness that's much more important.
Be gracious. gracious. It's the way that we answer things. It's not our cleverness or our forcefulness. Of course there's a place for bold proclamation, for authoritative declaration of God's word.
[28:10] And Paul as a preacher is asking them to pray that he would have just that. And that's what we should be praying for. But there's also a place, isn't there, for quiet, gracious words, especially when we're speaking to people one-to-one.

And of course all of this assumes, doesn't it, that our lives invite that kind of questioning, that people notice things about us. That's why Paul says we're to conduct ourselves wisely in verse 5.
What he means is live conspicuously godly lives, lives that attract attention so that people will see that there is something different about these Christians who love the Lord.
And Jesus says sometimes that will attract praise from people. In Matthew 5, remember verse 16, he says people will see our good deeds and praise the Father in heaven.
People will be attracted to the wholesomeness of true Christian life. Of course, Jesus also says, in the same passage actually in Matthew 5, sometimes it will bring persecution.
[29:18] It will revile us for our godly lives. God's But both of these things will give us opportunity to speak, won't they? With a gracious answer, with a gracious defense.

Where people are praising what they see in our lives or persecuting. Both of those gives us an opportunity for a gracious defense. And we can all do that, can't we?
We can speak a word for the Lord Jesus Christ, just naturally. Although it's good, it's helpful to train ourselves, to think and to be ready, well, what would I say?
What will I say when somebody asks me about that or that or that? God speaks, God evangelizes the lost just through the gospel centered daily lives of ordinary Christians who make the most of every opportunity, who be ready to speak a word in season, graciously seasoned with salt.
But also, and here's the third thing, God speaks to outsiders through a gospel centered corporate church life of ordinary churches.
[30:31] The New Testament tells us that just by being gathered together as the church, if our gatherings are of course centered on the gospel word being spoken and the gospel word being heard, then in these ordinary gatherings, the gospel will be proclaimed.

It will be proclaimed collectively by all of us, even to somebody who is a complete outsider, who stumbles into the midst and knows nothing whatsoever before they come in.
Turn over once again, or turn back rather to 1 Corinthians and halfway through 1 Corinthians chapter 14, Paul is talking about exactly this.
1 Corinthians 14 at verse 23, he says, if though for the whole church comes together, as we're doing this morning, and if all speak in tongues, the outsiders or unbelievers enter, will they not say, you're out of your minds.
But, if all prophesy, that is, if all tell forth God's words, and an unbeliever or outsider enters, he is convicted by all.
[31:46] He's called to account by all, not just by the preacher. The secrets of his heart are disclosed, and so falling on his face, he will worship God and declare, God is really among you.

Now, if you know this letter to the Corinthians, Paul is giving a lot of instructions about what the gatherings of the church ought to be like. And he's saying very clearly there in verse 23 that if

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everything is unintelligible, people are speaking in tongues, outsiders will think you're mad.
Well, the media love that kind of thing, don't they? They love to discredit churches. Oh, happy, clappy, weirdo, nonsense. And Paul is saying, no, don't be like that.
Rather, let everything be prophecy. Now, that means simply the proclamation of the word of God, telling forth the word of God. That's what prophecy is.
What he means by that is that every word in the service, every word spoken, is to be intelligible. gospel. And he's elaborating that in verse 26.
[32:55] He's talking about the hymns, the lessons, a revelation, interpretation, everything. In other words, every word that is spoken in the gathering is to be intelligible, and is to be something that builds up the Christians.

And if that is happening, Paul says, it's very different. when all the words are gospel words, when all the teaching, the prayer, the praise, and so on, all the things which will build up the church, not only will the church be built up and strengthened, look at verse 24 again.
If an unbeliever or outsider enters, he is convicted by all. He's called to account by all. The secret of his hearts are declared and so falling on his face.
He will worship God and declare that God is truly among you. Isn't that striking? A total unbeliever, a newcomer, can be totally transformed, can come to faith in God.
I mean, that's what he's saying when he says he'll fall down and worship just in a normal church meeting that is not an evangelistic meeting specifically at all. It's a meeting very clearly, Paul is saying, to build up believers.
[34:14] But then when all the congregation in their praise, what they sing, in their listening, in their prayer, they're all evangelizing. They're all evangelizing that unbeliever, that untaught person who comes in.

They're all proclaiming the gospel to the outsiders in the midst, just by being there in church. All are convicting and holding him to account, says Paul. of course, that assumes that everything that is being spoken, everything that is being sung, is prophetic in that sense.
It is truly edifying. It is true truth about God that is being heard, not just wishy-washy nonsense. But the power of God is being manifest in the midst of his people when that is happening, in an ordinary church service.
God is in the midst when his people are gathered in his name and when they're focusing on his word. And he is speaking through the corporate voice of every believer in that church so that outsiders who come into the midst of God's people will meet God, hear his voice, and come to know him.
Isn't that a striking thing? In Psalm 22, the psalmist speaks about God dwelling or inhabiting the praises of Israel.
[35:43] And Peter in his first letter speaks about how we, the church, are a royal priesthood. We are called to proclaim the excellencies, the praises of him who called us out of darkness and into his marvelous light.

And that's the same language of praise in the temple in Jerusalem. So just as the praises of Israel in the temple of the Lord rang out to proclaim to the surrounding nations the glory of the one true God, the God of all the world.
So also when we gather today as the church of Jesus Christ, we too are declaring his saving grace to the world. We are the temple, Paul says to us, and the Holy Spirit of God is dwelling in the midst of that temple.
That's what Paul says to the same Corinthians back in chapter 3 of this letter. In chapter 5 he speaks about when the church is gathered in his name, the power of the Lord Jesus is in the midst. And that's why what he's saying here in chapter 14 in these verses that we've read is true. That when God's people are gathered in Christ's name, when they're focused on his word, in what is heard, in what is said, in what is sung, in what is prayed, then God's living and powerful voice will be heard, and his name will become known even to outsiders.
[37:16] I wonder if you ever thought of that, that every one of us here in this building this morning, in this gathering, every one of us is an evangelist. Every Sunday morning, every Sunday evening, whenever we gather together as the church and the power of the Lord Jesus is present.

All of us are proclaiming the gospel. from the very first words that are spoken when we come in, to the very last words over coffee. Not just in what is said, but in the manner of how things are said, in

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the manner of how we participate.
You're proclaiming something to every newcomer who comes in. Think about that when you're singing. What are you proclaiming? A message that goes, or a joyful message, proclaiming the greatness, the goodness of God.
Every one of us is an evangelist. And people will come to know the Lord Jesus Christ, hearing his voice, falling down before him in ordinary church service, not in special evangelistic events, but where the power of the Lord Jesus is in the midst.
In fact, you know, people who are not Christians are often very defensive, they're often very ill at ease if they know that an event is especially aimed at them. Or come along to this event, it's aimed at people like you who are not Christians.
[38:35] Well, you're bound to be defensive, aren't you? You're bound to feel targeted. You would feel targeted. They're often much more relaxed if they're just coming to sort of sit in and see what Christians do together in church.

Come along and see what we do in church. It's not really for you, it's for us, but come and spectate, come and watch. They're just being there, you see, they are hearing the word of God, they're hearing the gospel being proclaimed by all together in everything that is said and done and in the way that it's said and done.
They're not seeing in a true gospel church just dreary, dead religiosity. Maybe that's what they expect when they come to church. Many people have only ever been in a church at their grandparents' funeral.
But if they come and if they see a people alive in the presence of the living God, what a difference. And where even a few are gathered in Jesus' name, proclaiming his word, what does Jesus say? There am I in the midst. Now, is that just a metaphor? Or is he saying the power of the living God is in the presence, in the midst of his people when they're gathered?
[39:48] the one in whose hand is all authority in heaven and on earth, the one whose voice created the universe, whose voice raises the dead to life forever.

And he speaks his word, even to outsiders, to the ignorant, to the untaught, in ordinary churches, on ordinary Sundays. Except, of course, there's nothing ordinary, is there, about the presence of the living God.
That's why special guest services, evangelistic events, and things so-called, they're not necessary. They're not bad, but they're not necessary for there to be a powerful evangelism to outsiders.
I mean, actually, sometimes they can be a distraction. They put people's focus away from where the real power is at work, in normal means of grace. Miraculous.
as that is, week by week, in just the ordinary church life, of ordinary gatherings for corporate worship. People can so easily be distracted.
[40:59] Christians can often be so distracted, wanting something a bit more exciting, a bit more apparently impressive than just normal church. Is there anything special happening in your church this Sunday?

Sometimes people ask their pastor, maybe hoping there'll be some special event, something out of the ordinary. Well, yes, says the pastor. We've got a very special guest coming to join us and speak on Sunday.
You'll definitely want to hear him. Is that so? Well, I know him. Well, I hope so. You certainly need to come and listen to what he has to say because he's the creator of the universe.
He's the Lord of heaven and earth. He's the judge of the living and the dead. And he will have things to say to you personally about your life. He'll have things to say to us about the future of this planet in both time and eternity.
That's the special event that we have this coming Sunday and next Sunday and the one after that and the one after that. In fact, every Sunday. Don't think you should miss that, should you?
[42:02] And I think you better tell your friends and your families. They won't want to miss it either. Friends, that is the truth about the Lord Jesus Christ and what he is doing on any given Sunday in the midst of his people, gathered in his name and around his word.

If God's word is being spoken and heard intelligibly, erstwhile unbelievers, outsiders, will find themselves saying, God really is here. He is really among you. I must hear more.
And that's why more people come to faith, far, far more. Just by being brought to church by friends or finding their way themselves into the midst of a church, far more than by so-called special

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events.
Of course, it may not be instantaneous, it may be just the beginning. They realize that there's more they need to know, there's questions they need to ask, and so on. That's why we run a life course alongside Sundays, to give a forum for these things, for questions, for other things that people want to raise and have answered.
But as the psalmist says in Psalm 138, I think it is, God has exalted above all things, above all things, his name and his word. And so that means that when we gather in his name, and when we're focused on proclaiming his word and praising his name, then he is here in the midst to bless, to bless people and to call people into his name.
[43:34] God and that's why the weekly gatherings of gospel centered churches are the most important events for the health of our city and for the health of our whole nation.

The forefathers of our city here, the Glasgow city fathers, knew that when they made the motto of our city, Lord, let Glasgow flourish by the preaching of your word and the praising of your name. They knew that. So do we want our city to flourish? Of course we do. Well, let's all rejoice to play our part then in proclaiming the gospel message, which alone will nurture that true and wholesome human life that we need for our city to flourish, both now and always.
All of us, you see, all of us, whether we are specially gifted evangelists, that'll be a very few, or whether we're normally gifted evangelists, that's most of us, in our daily lives, but also in our corporate life together.
To the praise of his great and glorious name, we have a part in this glorious mission. God speaks, yes, through gifted evangelists.
[44:47] Thank God for the Billy Grahams of this world. But he also speaks through gospel centered daily lives, through ordinary Christians who redeem the time, who are ready with gracious words, seasoned, honest words, just whenever God brings opportunities into our daily lives.

And he brings them friends every single day, doesn't he? And God also speaks, I think, above all, through gospel centered churches.
Whenever we're together, gathered in his name, when we're focused on exalting his name, exalting and hearing his word alone, not meeting together because of some dull religious duty, or if there just happens to be no football on the TV, not meeting with a me focused, self-absorbed kind of thing, looking for our own experience, the particular way we want it, no, no, no, but rather coming together expectantly, determined to play our part in the corporate witness of the church to Christ our Savior.
so that, yes, whenever an outsider should come in, and let's seek to make sure that there are outsiders coming in every single week to our services, and work for that, but when they do, they cannot help but be struck by the presence of God himself in the midst of a people whose focus is so manifestly on God, and seeking his word, his word of life and power and truth, his word that transforms lives, transforms eternity.
See, in all of these ways, every single one of us here is called to be a proclaimer of the gospel message. God has given us all, all the various gifts of the spirit in the church and for the church, and he's given us these gifts to do just that, and that means every single one of us is part of the body, every single one of us has a vital part to play, whether in public or in private, whether it's seen or whether it's unseen.
[46:56] Not one of us is not called to that ministry of proclamation of God's word, of speaking the truth in love. That's how mission happens, and that's how the church of Christ will grow and keep growing.

Just listen to Paul's words once again then, as we close. The Lord gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors, teachers, to equip all the saints for our work of ministry, for building the body of Christ until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.
That's our calling together. God has given us all we need. Let's pray that he would help us to joyfully play our part. Let's pray.
Heavenly Father, we thank you that you have not excluded any one of us from this joyful ministry of the proclamation of your gospel, the word of life, the word which draws from death to life, the word which equips every one of us for our life, and the word which will lead us always in the way of everlasting life.

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To help us, Lord, we pray every one of us to rejoice in the sheer privilege of being involved as your evangelists, and may we see more and more people seeing that you are in our midst and hearing your voice, calling them also to the joy that we share.
[48:43] hear us, Lord, and help us, we pray, for Jesus' sake. Amen.

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