



A Church On Mission

Today's Scripture Text

1 Corinthians 16:1-24

Sermon Points

#1. A church on mission is a giving church

- Read 1 Corinthians 16:5-12

It was obvious to the early church that they were a new movement, that went against culture, with high moral and social expectations and radical beliefs. Had it just been a new religion, it would never have taken off because it came at such a cost. They had to give up idol-worship, dodge the Romans who expected them to worship the Emperor and they even had to, at times, avoid eating the meat that they had once enjoyed, because it was offered to idols, and over the next few decades the persecution would only increase.

Being a Christian was radical, and would not have held any benefit, unless it was true. Because God, in human form, had died and risen from the dead to conquer sin and death, it changed everything. Such a reality demanded their very lives, as it does ours. The one benefit the early church had, was that it was so new, so radical and so obviously life-changing, that it stood out, in the face of everything they had known and experienced before. It was crazy for them to become a Christian, whereas we have been brought up with Christianity around for years. In South Africa, it was so entrenched in culture that, in years gone by, it was seen as “improper” to not attend church or be called a Christian. This has warped the reality of what it really means to be a follower of Christ. Christianity has become one of many acceptable choices in life, and so we have forgotten how life-transforming the gospel really is. We even tend to live in slight shame of being a Christian, because it's not seen “cool” or intellectual. We are not faced with being burned at the stake, or thrown to the lions because we choose Jesus over the political party of the day. But the early church had a real taste of that, and it made the decision to become a Christian, and part of the church a very serious one.

The opposition to the church spreading was great. The original church in Jerusalem was facing extreme poverty, and they needed the other churches to keep them alive. Paul was not just a humanitarian, but he was a father in the faith, and saw all of the churches as part of the same family. As any good father, he did what was necessary to look after his children. He called each of the churches that he had birthed, to step up and help carry the burden of the church in Jerusalem by calling them to pull in their belts, stretch themselves and give, not just once but from every paycheck. He did not ask politely, or appeal to their emotions, but rather instructed them. As members of the same family, they were expected to give. It was their responsibility. But there was more to it than that. Paul taught them what Christian giving should look like. He wanted them to be intentional, to count the cost and to set aside an apportioned amount of money from their regular wages. He wanted them to think it through and give from what they were able to give. But make no mistake, he was not asking them for a sprinkle of cash from their excess. The church in Jerusalem needed long-term help to survive, and it was on the shoulders of the rest of the churches to step up and sacrifice for their brothers and sisters in the Lord.



This is a total mind shift for us. We have reduced the idea of giving to just reaching the 10% mark from our salary (some of us do this even after tax). We feel proud of ourselves if we give that, and yet if Paul was here, he would probably be asking us to cut down on our lifestyles that are excessive, to live in smaller houses, drive simpler cars, and give what we have to the churches in the poorer suburbs or local townships, to help our brothers and sisters to get through every day with enough food to survive. He would be calling each one of us to pull in our spending and to plan with intention to give, in order to meet the needs of other churches who need our help – because they are our family.

- ❖ Why do you think it was a little more obvious for the early church that the believers in other churches were actually family, and needed to be fully supported?
- ❖ Why do you think we struggle to really connect with other churches, and to see them as brothers and sisters in the Lord?
- ❖ A significant part of our apportioned monthly tithing/giving is given to help plant churches as well as to initiatives that help the poor. Do you feel as though in paying your monthly tithe that you are personally giving sacrificially to Christians in need?
- ❖ Many of us like to give when there is a crisis, but get bored or burdened by long term need. If we knew of families in our own church who could not pay for their medical aid, or keep up with their kid's school fees, even though working long hours and being financially responsible, would you want to know about it and commit to helping them get through each month? Do you think that this is something that gospel communities could get involved in, and what do you think it would cost us in order to make a long-term difference in the life of a single mom, or family with unique financial challenges? In what capacity, would we be willing to stretch ourselves, curb our spending and sacrifice some luxuries in order to help our brothers and sisters in the Lord – starting within our own church?

#2. A church on mission has a plurality of faithful leaders that do the work of the Lord

- Read 1 Corinthians 16:5-12

As we saw earlier on in Paul's letter, the Corinthians had been fighting over the different leaders, and Paul had had to put a stop to it. In the world, people run after the charismatic, influential people and tend to shun anyone that does not look or play the part. But this is not how the gospel works. Though Paul was a very learned man and an excellent leader, he was at times esteemed and at other times rejected. The flavor of the month seemed to be Apollos, and Timothy would have been seen and regarded as a nobody. So, once again, Paul needed to remind the church that regardless of who the leader was, that he was appointed by God and should be treated with respect and care. Paul would have been the best person to visit the Corinthians, and yet he confidently sent Timothy to do the work that needed to be done. The church has always required and utilized a variety of different types of leaders to get the job done. As church members, it is not our job to evaluate how powerful or influential we think the leaders may or may not be, but to receive and follow them as they do the work of the Lord.

- ❖ What does it tell us about Paul, that he was willing to send Timothy to the church in Corinth, rather than making a plan to go himself?
- ❖ Why is it so important for church leaders to leave their insecurities behind and serve the church they are called to, regardless of how gifted they may or may not be?



- ❖ Why is it equally as important for us church members to fully support and follow the leaders God puts in charge of us?
- ❖ Why is it important that we fully embrace the “Timothy”-type leader and not just the “Apollos”-type leader?

#3. A church on mission have members devoted to the work of the ministry – for Jesus

- Read 1 Corinthians 16:13-20

This letter is very helpful to us in 2017, as it helps us to understand how interdependent the early church was. We are so far removed from this kind of reality today. Our culture is so self-sufficient, that depending on others is considered a sign of weakness, and when others do depend on us, it feels burdensome to us. So, we find it extremely difficult to even conceptualize being part of something where we are genuinely united at a heart level, and interdependent on a practical level. We do not want to connect at that level because we know it will cost us. The early church knew nothing else. As people were saved, they were “born” into a new family, and each person had to find a way to contribute to the health of the church. We saw earlier in the letter, how the Holy spirit gifted each person in order to play a part in building up the church. Each gift played an important part in making the church healthy.

We need to see ourselves as well-functioning siblings, that have responsibilities towards one another, as well as the benefits of being part of a family. Though there are many functions of a church family, our main goal is to reach the lost and bring them into our family. Each one of us has a unique role to play in the mission, and we should do it alongside one another, encouraging each other, and partnering with one another as we work.

Paul exhorted the Corinthians to be intentional about their lives on mission. The same is true for us. We must...

- ☞ Be watchful – we need to guard our hearts and thoughts, being vigilant over the deceit of the evil one.
 - ☞ Stand firm – we need to hold fast to the teaching of Scripture and continue to pursue Christ. We need to make sure that when opposition or trial come our way that we are not taken out emotionally. We need to build spiritual muscle that will help us to endure.
 - ☞ Be courageous – courage is more often than not the decision to continue to move forward and not shrink back. It often means to silence the critic, the accusations and the temptations and to choose to continue in the faith and the mission regardless of the temptation to opt out.
 - ☞ Be strong – we need to continue to add to our faith so that we build our spiritual muscle. Instead of looking to ourselves, we need to look to God for strength.
 - ☞ Do everything in love – being on mission must be motivated by our love for God and for his lost people.
- ❖ What does Paul mean by the “work of the ministry”?
 - ❖ Why is it important that every person in the church be involved, at some level, in the work of the ministry?
 - ❖ We are all spiritually gifted to help build up our own church and we are also all called to be on mission outside of the church. How do you feel about the fact that you are called to be on mission/do the work of the ministry?
 - ❖ In what way are you currently “on mission” or doing ministry? If you are not on mission at all, in what way can you start being intentional about being ministry-focused in some area of your life?