



Sermon Growth Guide

January 12, 2025

God's Mission Has a Church - Take Up The Cause

Hebrews 10:32-39

Key Verse: Hebrews 10:39

But we do not belong to those who shrink back and are destroyed but to those who have faith and are saved.

Big Idea: God has a church for his mission in the world.

Foundations

God is at work in this world. God has a mission to save, restore and redeem all of lost creation. What we need to do is figure out what God is doing and try to be a part of it. We talk about the mission of the church but it is more important to remember, it isn't so much that God has a mission for the church as it is that God has made a church for His mission. God doesn't exist to serve our mission; the church exists to serve the mission of God. God's Mission Has a Church.

God is not done writing the story. Hang in there. God is at work in good and ill. We like to think that God is enlisted in our story. We have a great plan, God, so please get on board! Christopher Wright wrote, "It is not so much the case that God has a mission for his church in the world, as that God has a church for his mission in the world. Mission was not made for the church; the church was made for mission - God's mission." Our hope is to be fully in God's hands as an instrument for His mission to save a lost and fallen world. Do not lose hope. Do not shrink back. Have faith. God is on the case.

As we begin this new series, ask God to help us as a church body to understand what it means to be God's people on God's mission here in Colorado Springs. Pray deeply for the needs in your Life Group.

Understanding God's Word

Together, Hebrews 10:32-39.

What do you think "the light" is in verse 32?

According to verse 33, what was it like to be a first century Christian?

Looking at verse 37, what is one of the greatest promises of the Christian faith?

Applying God's Word

God has a church for his mission in the world.

How may you grow as an ambassador for Christ in your daily life?

Witnessing God's Word

To witness to God's mission, we must understand God's mission.

This week let's take time for two of three of us to articulate the gospel message and God's mission to one another. Take 3 - 5 minutes each and encourage one another that the gospel movement of Jesus is taking root in our hearts!

Is history the story of great men or great moments? Philosophers and historians have wrestled with that. What is history? Some see it as a series of great men and women, people who rise up and change things by the strength of their personality and charisma. Great names. Some of them terrible, like Genghis Khan. I was surprised when I went to Mongolia that their airport is named Genghis Khan International Airport! If you knew that guy, you wouldn't want to land there. Alexander the Great. Napoleon. Hitler. Stalin. Or positive leaders like, I don't know, Charlemagne or Joan of Arc. Gregory the Great, Saint George, or George Washington. Who would you name? It's easier for me to name the tyrants. Or is history about great moments, and the moments produced the leadership. There are special people, but no demigods. Some happened to be present at a moment of crisis, an inflection point, and the moment made the man, the purpose shaped the person. Which is it?

Over Christmas break I watched the new Netflix documentary on Winston Churchill. What a figure! What a moment in history. We could all be giving the Nazi salute right now. The right man for the right moment. Churchill believed in the "great man" theory; he put himself under constant pressure to be such a man, to make himself a great, history-shaping, world-stage, timeless-impact person. He was raised for it. Churchill was born and raised in Blenheim Palace to Lord and Lady Randolph Churchill, down from John Churchill, the 7th Duke of Marlborough. He was supposed to grow up and change the world. Great men. But Winston was not perfect. He was just a man, with his own frailties and foibles and fears. Did the man make the moment, or did the moment make the man? Here's the thing. I don't know if it's great men and women or great moments, great purposes or great people, great philosophers and ideas and culture makers, I don't know. But I know this—as the timeline of history is drawn, it is God with the hand on the

pencil. As we get rolling on 2025, know that, rest on that, God owns history. God has His hand on the pencil of your life as well.

We are going to look in this series at that very idea. God is up to something. The story of life, the story of history, the story of the world, ultimately it isn't HIStory, it isn't HERstory, it is God's story. God is the protagonist; God is the hero. You and I, we get to play a part, if we will. There is a great book by a Christian scholar named Christopher Wright called *The Mission of God*. His point was that to understand the Bible, you have to look at it in the right way. We use the Bible to inspire us, to encourage us in our life, and that is good. Billy Graham said the Bible is God's love letter to us. That's true. But, we need to know and understand, what the Bible is primarily doing is not telling our story, stories of men and women and moments, the Bible is revealing God's story. God is the main character of the Bible. And if we come to understand that, it will change how we live. It isn't about you and me making our mark. History isn't about political parties making change or student movements or protest uprisings forcing a new world order. It isn't ultimately in the hands of the revolutionaries, with the "destroy the past and make your own future" attitude of Goethe or Nietzsche or Marx. History does not finally belong to the tyrants who rise up to force their will on the world. God holds the pencil.

It even seeps into the church. We think sometimes that the church is our mission and we enlist God's support. We are doing a lot of work to clarify our mission, and that's good. When we see what we are doing, we know how to contribute to it. But we also need to remember, the more important thing is what God is doing. We worry if we don't make this church fly, if we don't put this church together to make it all successful, the world will be lost! Christopher Wright wrote, "It is not so much the case that God has a mission

for his church in the world, as that God has a church for his mission in the world. Mission was not made for the church; the church was made for mission – God's mission." That's what we are going to think about for the next seven weeks. God's Mission Has a Church. God is up to something. God is at work. We get to be a part of it, if we will. So Take Up the Cause. We are going to dip into a rich few chapters of the book of Hebrews and see how the story of everything is the mission of God.

Hebrews is a little bit of a mysterious book. It doesn't tell us who wrote it. It is definitely early, written in Greek, and for an audience of Jewish Christians, new believers who were Jewish and started following Jesus. That could put them in Rome, or Antioch, or Corinth, we don't know. But we do know they were persecuted for turning to Christ. "Remember those earlier days after you had received the light, when you endured in a great conflict full of suffering. Sometimes you were publicly exposed to insult and persecution; at other times you stood side by side with those who were so treated." (Hebrews 10:32-33) They suffered imprisonment and they had property taken or destroyed. Is this life really worth it? Is it worth it to follow Jesus if it includes suffering? We are not the only people in history who looked to religion for its usefulness. "This works if it works for me. I'll follow Jesus so long as it makes my life better." Well, it does make your life better, but the reason to follow Jesus is not that it profits but that it is true. It is real. And when you truly absorb that, you realize that losing everything in this world, reputation, creature comforts, material goods, it just doesn't match up to the reward of being with Jesus and the reward of the eternal life to come. "You suffered along with those in prison and joyfully accepted the confiscation of your property, because you knew that you yourselves had better and lasting possessions. So do not throw away your confidence; it will be richly rewarded." (Hebrews 10:34-35) When your faith

was new you had that confidence. Don't give it away now; don't lose it now that you are suffering, when everything is not working out according to your own best laid plans.

This is when we are tempted to shrink back. This is when we are tempted to walk away from putting our faith in Jesus, resting our lives in Him by faith, and we are tempted instead to take our lives into our own hands. But God is coming. Jesus is coming. The Kingdom is coming, in just a little while. "For, 'In just a little while, he who is coming will come and will not delay.' And, 'But my righteous one will live by faith. And I take no pleasure in the one who shrinks back.'" (Hebrews 10:37-38) God's heart is saddened when we shrink back into our shells like a turtle. He knows there is so much we are missing when we go through life with our hands over our faces like a boxer on defense. "But we do not belong to those who shrink back and are destroyed, but to those who have faith and are saved." (Hebrews 10:39)

God is doing something. God is on a mission to save this lost world of His. We don't want to shrink back when trials come. We want to stay open, leaning forward, living by faith, we take up the cause, we join the cause. What is this cause? This is the story of everything. God created this world in love and us in it. Our disobedience and rebellion twisted our hearts away from God and took this world down in a twisted maelstrom with us. But God would not allow us to fall into the destruction of our own making. When we were His enemies, He declared us His friends. He chose a people to bless and show His character to the world. He sent Prophets. He sent rescuers and redeemers. He kept showing up. He gave us His Word to guide us. Then, in the fullness of time, He sent His Son. He Himself took on flesh in Jesus Christ and carried to the cross the destruction and wrath we deserved, and died, and rose again because death had no purchase

on the Messiah of God. And now all who call on the name of Jesus are God's temple, God's outpost on this foreign and disobedient land. And God sustains us by His Holy Spirit to be a part of His redeeming work, to take up the cause, to lean in, until all is restored. Don't shrink back; take up the cause. God has the pencil in His hand, and your own life is part of the greatest story ever told.

Henry Blackaby, who wrote *Experiencing God* used to say find out what God is doing and join in. "We don't choose what we will do for God; He invites us to join Him where He wants to involve us." Over break, I also read David McCasland's biography of Eric Liddell. Liddell is the runner who inspired the movie "Chariots of Fire." He was famous for giving up his place in the 100-meter dash in the 1924 Paris Olympics, even though he was favored to win gold, because the race was scheduled on Sunday and that is the Sabbath Day. He won gold in the 400-meter race instead. He said, "I believe God made me for a purpose, but he also made me fast! And when I run I feel his pleasure." Here is a man abandoned, fully submitted to God. If you believed "great man" theory, you would never walk away from running the 100-meter dash. You have the chance to take the gold! You have the chance to represent Scotland with a win, to be a national hero, to enter history, to be remembered and revered. It wasn't really a protest. It wasn't for a demonstration. It was an admission, a confession, "I just can't run on the day that belongs to the Lord. It's okay. Someone else can fill in."

"Tim, I thought this sermon was about getting in the fight, joining the cause, Take Up the Cause. That guy had a chance to stand on the world stage as a Christian—a successful, victorious, winning, gold-medal-earning Christian. He could lift his finger up and wink at God, 'All for you, Jesus.' And he missed it. He avoided it. He didn't engage." Yes, this is about taking up the cause. If you believe "great person" theory, you would never walk away from that race. This

is my chance to make my name! If you believe God holds the pencil and God writes the history, then joining the cause is not about casting your glorious gains toward God, deflecting your earned glory His way, it is about total, complete, humble submission to Jesus your Master. "I am yours, to do with as you will."

That is the true story of Eric Liddell. Born into a missionary family, he was raised in a boarding school in London for children whose parents were in the mission field. Though they loved each other deeply, he spent more years apart from his parents than with them. This was the early 1900's. You couldn't fly back and forth to China. You couldn't phone or facetime. You were just apart. After the Olympics, he fulfilled his own call to mission work in China. He met a girl, but her parents wouldn't let them marry until she finished nursing school in Canada, and Eric in China. They waited years. Married in 1934, they had a few short years together in fruitful ministry, had three daughters, but war came. Japan invaded China in 1937. Soon they were separated, and then Eric landed in a war camp. Conditions were difficult, but it was an inoperable brain tumor that took his life. In the end, he spent more years apart from the ones he truly loved than with them. Then he died there in 1945.

That's a terrible story. Tim, why did you tell that story? That's horrible! Only if this life is all there is. For as much as Eric loved to be in the arms of his wife, Patricia, and of his daughters, Heather, Flo, and Maureen, as and much as they all loved to be in his arms and hold him in theirs, greater still was to be in the arms of the Savior and in His perfect will, in absolute surrender, complete surrender, total trust that Jesus is making something of your life, that Jesus is writing the story that needs to be told, that Jesus will make it all right in the end. Take up the cause. What is God doing? How can we be a part? We will pick it up there next week.