

Spotlight: Purpose & mission of the church

Starter for 10: What is church?

Old Testament background

קָהָל (*qāhāl*) – assembly/gathering

The Assembly (of YHWH) — e.g. Num 16:3, 33, 47; 15:15; 19:20; 20:4, 6, 10, 12; Deut 23:2–3, 8; Joel 2:16; Micah 2:5; 1 Chron 28:8; 2 Chron 1:3, 5; Neh 13:1; Prov 5:14; 26:26

The Assembly of Israel — e.g. Ex 16:3; Lev 4:13–14, 21; 16:17, 33; Num 14:5; 1 Kings 12:3; 2 Chron 7:8, (Judah: 2 Chron 20:5, 14; 23:3; 24:6; 28:14; 29:28, 31–32; 30:2, 4, 13, 17, 23–25); (The returning exiles: Ezra 2:64; 10:1, 8, 12–14; Neh 5:13; 7:66; 8:2, 17)

The Assembly in which there is reverent bowing, song and praise — e.g. 2 Chron 29:28; Pss. 22:22, 25; 35:18; 40:9–10; 89:5; 107:32; 149:1

What were the people gathered to do?

- *Always*: to hear from God
 - *His commitment to them*
 - *His instructions for them to live in the Land*
- To commit to the LORD covenantally (Josh 8)
- To confess sins and seek atonement (Lev 16)
- To show reverence, praise, pray, sing (Psalms)
- To feast together (e.g. 2 Chron. 30)

So, gathering to hear worship and praise, going back out to do

New Testament

ἐκκλησία (*ekklesiā*) – assembly/gathering

~75% of the time local gathering.

"To the church in/at..."

But several other times it is a global & catholic church:

Ephesians 1:22-23 (and elsewhere in Ephesians)

²²And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church, ²³which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way.

Or Hebrews 12:23a

²³to the church of the firstborn, whose names are written in heaven.

Which is a fulfilment of the OT assembly in Jesus

Hebrews in context – Hebrews 12:18-24

With more context – Hebrews 10:24-2

What are we saying?

Church is normally referring to the local **body** of believers, which is part of a wider universal, *catholic* (little c) eternal spiritual heavenly body of Christ, his bride, the living temple of God – pillar and buttress of the truth, made up of all believers for all time. *

Revelation – the song is getting louder

Purpose - What does Jesus' body do?

Our identity is bound up with Christ!

Our identity is bound up with what we do

Groupwork: What is our mission?

The difficulty: hard to agree

"Mission is all that God wishes to accomplish in the world so that he is glorified and God's kingdom expands universally and comprehensively ... on a generational, gender and global level."

Tom Steffen and Lois McKinney, missionary scholars

*"Mission is the endeavours of both individual Christians and the institutional church to continue and carry out the Missio Dei of the Triune God at both the micro and macro levels, spiritually (saving souls) and socially (ushering in shalom), for redemption, reconciliation, and transformation." **Enoch Wan, theologian.***

*"Mission ... is God creating and saving the world, and this includes not only creating and saving people but the natural world and indeed the cosmos as a whole." **Stephen Spencer, author.***

*"Mission is, quite simply, the participation of Christians in the liberating mission of Jesus ... It is the good news of God's love, incarnated in the witness of a community, for the sake of the world." **David Bosch, missiologist and theologian***

"Mission is ... finding out what God is doing and joining in."
Source contested.

Non negotiable

The gospel. Gospel-ing must be at the heart of everything. Jesus came as the gospel, gospel-ing. And commanded his disciples to do likewise

Matthew 28 ¹⁸ Then Jesus came to them and said, 'All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. ¹⁹ Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰ and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.'

Acts 1 ⁸ But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.'

1 Peter 3 ¹⁵ But in your hearts revere Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect,

1&2 Thessalonians

1 Thess. 1: ⁸ The Lord's message rang out from you not only in Macedonia and Achaia – your faith in God has become known everywhere.

2 Thess. 3:1 As for other matters, brothers and sisters, pray for us that the message of the Lord may spread rapidly and be honoured, just as it was with you.

1 Timothy 3 ¹⁴ Although I hope to come to you soon, I am writing to you with these instructions so that, ¹⁵ if I am delayed, you will know how people ought to conduct themselves in God's household, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and foundation of the truth. ¹⁶ Beyond all question, the mystery from which true godliness springs is great:

He appeared in the flesh,
was vindicated by the Spirit,
was seen by angels,
was preached among the nations,
was believed on in the world,
was taken up in glory.

And many more...

For what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?

¹⁶ For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. ¹⁷ For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. ¹⁸ Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because they have not believed in the name of God's one and only Son.

The point: without the gospel people are lost, dead (Ephesians 2), without God. And only through the gospel being gospel-ed can people repent and believe, and find life.

And – the way we do it:

1&2 Corinthians. & 1&2 Timothy. Etc.

1 Peter 3!

We gospel as Christians. Gospel without love is a clanging gong!

(n.b. it's also intelligible 1 Cor.14:23-25)

¹² Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us.

In context:

⁹ But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.

So we speak (non-negotiable and central), and we speak with visible integrity!

Example **Ephesians**: Gives the gospel message, our identity – and shows what that looks like. 1-3 parallel 4-6. Gospel at heart of Christian life.

What might that look like?

Some dangers

Mission creep – we may differ here.

Billy Graham, Berlin Congress 1966:

*"If the church went back to its main task of proclaiming the gospel and getting people converted to Christ, it would have a far greater impact on the social, moral and psychological needs of men than it could achieve through any other thing it could possibly do."*¹

John Stott:

*"The commission of the Church is not to reform society, but to preach the Gospel. Certainly Christ's disciples who have embraced the Gospel, and who themselves are being transformed by the Gospel, are intended to be salt of the earth and light of the world. That is, they are to influence the society in which they live and work by helping arrest its corruption and illumine its darkness. But the primary task of the members of Christ's Church is to be Gospel heralds, not social reformers."*²

¹ Billy Graham, 'Why The Berlin Congress?' *Christianity Today*, 11 November 1966, accessed September 26, 2023

² Melvin Tinker, "Reversal or Betrayal? Evangelicals and Sociopolitical Involvement in the Twentieth Century," *Churchman* 113 3: 257, accessed September 26, 2023

Lausanne 1, 1974

*"Fundamentally, both are important, but one is more important than the other."*³

*"Evangelism and socio-political involvement are both part of our Christian duty ... The message of salvation implies also a message of judgement upon every form of alienation, oppression and discrimination ... the salvation we claim should be transforming us in the totality of our personal and social responsibilities."*⁴

One year later:

*"Today . . . I would express myself differently. It is not just that the commission [ie the Great Commission] includes the duty to teach converts everything that Jesus had previously commanded (Matt 28:20), and that social responsibility is among the things which Jesus commanded. I see now more clearly that not only the consequences of the commission but the actual commission itself must be understood to include social as well as evangelistic responsibility."*⁵

1990 – one year after Lausanne II

Social responsibility is more than a consequence of evangelism; it is one of its principal aims' ... 'social activity ... accompanies [evangelism] as its partner. They are like the two blades of a pair of scissors or the two wings of a

³ John Stott, *The Contemporary Christian: An Urgent Plea for Double Listening*, (Nottingham: IVP, 1992), 339

⁴ Tinker, 258

⁵ Tinker, 258

bird, as they were in the public ministry of Jesus.' The partnership is, in reality, a marriage."

"Evangelism is primary because our chief concern is with the gospel, that all people may have the opportunity to accept Jesus Christ as their Lord and Saviour."⁶

Which might not sound much different to what we've just said... But the danger is what it enabled:

Quote from J.D. Payne on Lausanne III, Cape Town, 2010

"As time passed, I still did not hear a great deal of emphasis on the topic of global evangelization. I heard about a multitude of other extremely urgent and important matters such as migration, human-trafficking, urbanization, globalization, poverty, Islam, bioethics, AIDS/HIV, and the Majority World Church. I heard a great deal about the need for the Church to address the major humanitarian issues of the day. Again, very timely and important topics to which the Church should respond.

But where was the spirit of 1974? Where was the emphasis on reaching the unreached people groups? Where was the emphasis on evangelizing the different population segments of the world? Where was the focus on church planting?"⁷

⁶ Tinker, 260

⁷ JD Payne, "Cape Town 2010 will be known for ...," accessed September 15, 2023

How might we avoid the pitfall of mission creep?

How might we avoid the pitfall of the pendulum?

Other Dangers: Christian nationalism

How does the gospel spread?

Back to 1 Peter 2:11-17

Romans 13

Mission – local and global

Eating cake

Nations are at our doorsteps – London City Mission

We haven't reached the ends of the earth...

Even in Europe:

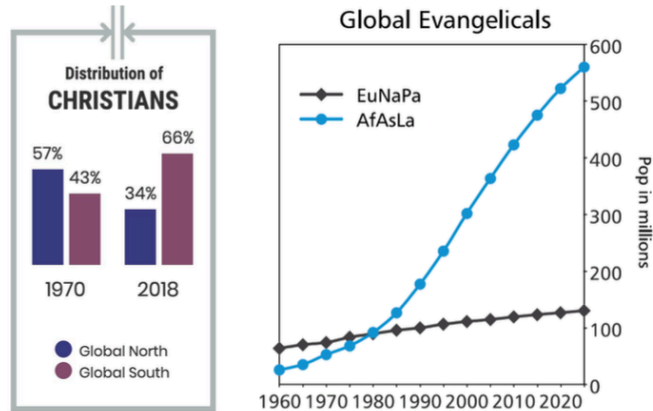
Slovenia – 0.1% Evangelical

Poland 0.3%

Austria 0.5%

Ireland – 120 communities with no evangelical witness

Majority world



The least reached

"Oman has more Starbucks than indigenous national believers"

The importance of world mission and sending

How does that work best?

Working with local church

Qualifications

Summary

The church is missional

Because of what God is doing

Gospel centred

No restoration of humanity without it

Local churches need to keep bigger view of gospel

Keep praying

Resources

Short article:

<https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/essay/the-mission-of-the-church/>

What Is the Mission of the Church? – Kevin DeYoung and Greg Gilbert

The Trellis and the Vine - Colin Marshall & Tony Payne

You will be my witnesses – Brian Devries