

**Biblical Theology: The Story of Scripture**

**Class 8: Mission**

Who can tell me where this line comes from: “This is your mission, should you choose to accept it?” Mission Impossible. The show, then movies, were about a team of secret government agents who would undertake missions that were...impossible.

The word mission is not in the Bible, but the word from which it emerges—“sent”—surely is. And the word mission is used simply to speak of *being sent with a purpose*.

If you’ve been here in the biblical theology class in previous weeks, you know that we’ve been tracing different themes through the biblical canon. The goal of this class is to trace the story of mission. What is God’s mission for humanity? What is God’s mission for his special people? What is his mission for the local church? What is his mission for you?

There’s been a heated discussion among evangelicals of late. One group will say, “The Great Commission is the mission of the church.” That’s what Kevin DeYoung and Greg Gilbert say in *What Is the Mission of the Church?* (p. 241). Others, however, will say, “It’s Loving God and Our Neighbor As Ourselves. The Great Commandment. So, caring for the poor and the social gospel.” Still other might say, “It’s imaging God from Genesis. The Cultural Mandate.”

And all this has implications for what we do as a church and how we direct the church budget? Do we direct toward staff? Missionaries? Caring for the poor? Digging water wells?

How would you answer: *What is the mission of the church? Or your mission as a church member?*

Have any of you ever heard a special invitation given during a revival service or a mission conference where the speaker says something like: “There’s nothing more important that you could do with your life than to surrender it to full time Christian service” ? Sometimes the appeal for new missionaries or pastors can make it seem as if Christian ministry is more important than living a Christian life in the normal workspace that most people find themselves in. But is there some truth to this? Is the work of the pastor more important than the work of a Christian layperson? They are fellow church-members, and aren’t they both involved in mission?

Jonathan Leeman tells the story of standing in the backyard of a neighbor who was a Lutheran minister. The neighbor and his adult son were planting a tree and his son made the remark that he was “on mission” by planting the tree. (Note: evidently Leeman is the author of the manuscript from Capitol Hill Baptist for this lesson.)

Again, what do you think? Is it the church’s mission to plant trees? To bake good bread? To be godly lawyers who pursue justice? And what about your job? What does it have to do with the mission of God and the mission of the church? What does it have to do with ministry, and is vocational ministry somehow better?

To answer these questions we—once again—want to think through the storyline of the Bible. In fact, we’re going to tell two stories from the Bible. The first story is about imaging God. The second story is about getting saved. And each time we’re going to quickly walk through six episodes in particular: creation, fall, Israel, Christ, church, glory.

## I. Story 1: Image God in Everything

### A. Creation

First, turn to Genesis 1. God creates the plants and the animals “*each according to its kind.*” Every apple is patterned after every other apple, and every zebra is patterned after every other zebra.

But then in verse 26, we read this: “*Then God said, “Let us make man in our image, after our likeness.”* Man is not patterned after another man. He is patterned after God. He uniquely mirrors, or resembles, God.

- Being uniquely created in the image of God, humans must uniquely image God and God’s glory before the rest of creation.
- Like a son who acts like his father and follows in his father’s professional footsteps (Gen. 5:1ff; Luke 3:38), man is designed to represent God’s character and rule over creation: “...and let them rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the livestock, over all the earth.”

You’ll remember that in one of our previous lessons we looked at how Eden was a sort of Temple (sacred space), and the original mission for Adam and Eve was to expand the borders of Eden and producing more and more image-bearers for God who would know and worship Him.

### B. Fall

So, step one, creation. Step two, the Fall and Genesis 3. Man decides *not* to represent God’s rule. He revolts against God and went to work representing his own rule.

- Verse 5: The serpent says, “*God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened and you will be like God.*” That’s an enticing image: me, like God. So Eve and then Adam took and ate. God therefore gave man what he asked for and banished him from his presence.

So now man is corrupt or perverted. The mirror is bent, you might say, and so a false image is portrayed, like a grotesque carnival mirror. Human rule now *is* abusive, oppressive, exploitative.

Okay: step 1. Man is created to image God and his rule and his character.

Step 2. Man decides to image his own rule—to display his own glory.

### C. Israel

Step 3. Israel. God, in his mercy, had a plan to both save and use a group of people for accomplishing his original purposes for creation—the display of his glory.

- In Exodus 4 he even calls this nation his “son” (vv. 22-23). Why a son? Because sons look like their dads. And they follow in their father’s footsteps. Sons image their fathers.

On the way to the Promised Land, he takes this son to a mountain called Sinai (turn to Exodus 20), and he says a number of things including this:

- First, v. 3, “*You shall have no other Gods before me.*”
- Second, v. 4, “*You shall not make for yourself an idol [image] in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below.*” Israel was to keep the first commandment—“*have no other gods before me*”—by displaying God’s image and glory, which, naturally, precludes bowing down to some other image. You’ll remember that

Israel then takes up Adam and Eve’s original mission, Köstenberger in NDBT summarizes:

*“Israel is to mediate God’s presence and blessings to the surrounding nations, as a people set apart to serve a holy God.”* (A.J. Köstenberger, “Mission”, NDBT, p. 663.)

God warned that if this son, Israel, did chase after other images and failed to display God’s own holy character, he would cast him out of the land. To make a long story short, the son didn’t choose God’s image, but others, and God cast him out of his presence and the land.

One of the main lessons of ancient Israel is that fallen human beings, left to themselves, cannot image God’s character and glory.

## D. Christ

Step 4. Christ. Turn to Luke 3:22. Jesus is baptized. The Holy Spirit descends on him. And then a voice comes from heaven: “*You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased.*”

Here is the perfect Son—capital “S”—who perfectly pleases the Father. Then notice in the rest of the chapter. There’s a genealogy which ends with verse 38, “*the son of Enosh, the son of Seth, the son of Adam, the son of God.*”

Immediately after the genealogy, Jesus is tempted by Satan, just like Adam. But the beloved Son does what Adam didn’t do, and what Israel didn’t do. He perfectly images and so glorifies God, by listening to God’s Word. Jesus recapitulates all of history. He redoes it.

Like Father, like Son.

No wonder the writers of the New Testament epistles look back and call him the “*image of the invisible God*” (Col. 1:15) and “*the radiance of God’s glory and the exact representation of his being*” (Heb. 1:3). “*Whoever has seen me has seen the Father,*” Jesus said (John 14:9). Adam’s corruption problem—solved!

## E. Church

Step 5. Church. Turn to:

**Romans 8:29** “*For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers.*”

**1 Corinthians 15:49** “Just as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we shall also bear the image of the man of heaven.”

**2 Corinthians 3:18** “And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit.”

**Colossians 3:9-10** “Do not lie to one another, seeing that you have put off the old self with its practices and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator.”

What does God call the church to do? We are to display the *character* and *likeness* and *image* and *glory* of the Son and the Father in heaven!

- The Father’s a peacemaker, so you be peacemakers, church.
- The Father loves his enemies, so you love your enemies, church.
- The Father and I are one, so you be one, church.
- My Father is perfect, so you be perfect, church.
- The Father sent me, so I’m sending you, church.

Like Father, like Son, and like sons.

This dovetails again with Adam and Israel’s missions, to expand the knowledge of God by expanding sacred space. G.K. Beale says it this way:

*“All believers in Christ are priests whose service reflect God’s presence to others through their life and words. This reflection of God’s presence in the unseen sanctuary shines light into the darkness of the world and transforms those in the darkness to reflect God’s presence and become reflective images of God in his temple. This is how the temple expands throughout the church age.”* (G.K. Beale, *God Dwells Among Us: Expanding Eden to the Ends of the Earth*, p. 122)

2 Cor. 6:16-18 tie God’s dwelling among us with a call for holiness – and closeness to God as his sons and daughters.

## F. Glory

Step 6. We will image him most perfectly when we see him perfectly in glory: “But we know when he appears we will be like him, because we shall see him as he is” (1 John 3.2). Holy like him. Loving like him. United like him. This verse isn’t promising that we’ll be gods. It’s promising that our souls will gleam brightly with his character and glory, like perfect mirrors facing toward the sun!

Did you follow the story? Here’s the recap.

- God created the world and humankind to display the image glory of who he is. That is his mission for humanity. Image is everything.
- Adam and Eve, who were supposed to image God’s character, didn’t.
- Neither did the people of Israel.
- The Son did. In Christ, God came to display God. And in Christ, God came to save.
- Now the church is called to image, to display, the character and glory of God to all the universe, testifying in word and action to his great wisdom and work of salvation.

In other words, God intends to use the corporate life of the local church to accomplish his creation purposes—displaying his wise, holy, and loving image for all the world to see. That is, in one sense, is the mission of the church: to display the image of God, and to do so in a way

that's set apart from humanity because they only present distorted images. Our work is an image-recovery work. We are to live as the transformed humanity.

Another word or category to use for all of this is worship. When we worship something we ascribe *worth* to it, which you can see by thinking of the Old English word for worship: *worth-skip*. To consciously and deliberately image God and God's purposes and God's judgments is to ascribe worth to him. It is the heart of our worship.

For now, we can say, very broadly, that the mission of the church is to be the true humanity. And as the true humanity, we are to set the example of God-imagining, dominion-pursuing lives for all humanity.

“You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled underfoot. **14** “You are the light of the world. A town built on a hill cannot be hidden. **15** Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. **16** In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven. (Matt. 5:13-16).

But where does the Great Commission fit into all of this? The quote shared earlier, said “The Great Commission is the mission.” I've given you a very **broad** answer: imaging God in everything. They have provided a **narrower** answer: making disciples and baptizing and teaching everything Jesus commanded.

Which of these two answers is right?

## II. Storyline 2: Proclaim Salvation through Sacrifice

I'd like to tell the storyline of the Bible one more time, but this time I want to draw out a theme that was there the first time, but I want to make it a little clearer. And let's go through the same six episodes.

### A. Creation

Adam and Eve walked with Garden, sinless, with the promise of eternal life.

### B. The Fall

Adam and Eve ate the forbidden fruit and earned the judgment of death. Adam doesn't just have a corruption problem, as we thought about in the previous story. He has a guilt problem. He has broken a law and earned a penalty.

Gratefully, God foreshadows the solution by sacrificing a couple of animals and giving Adam and Eve the animal skin to cover their nakedness and shame.

### C. Israel

Episode 3: Israel. God calls Abraham, and then he saves Abraham's descendants out of slavery in Egypt. He brought them across the Red Sea as a great act of salvation. But first he demonstrates through the Passover sacrifice that he would Passover their sin. He also gave them his law, which would teach them that the real salvation they needed would be from themselves and their own sin. Included in that law, after all, are sin offerings, and provisions for a Day of Atonement.

Sure enough, the people sinned and were exiled. The lesson was they couldn't save themselves. They needed a Savior, a Messiah.

#### **D. Christ**

Good news: Christ came as that savior. Episode 4.

He came not only as the perfect kingly son who imaged God. He came as the Passover Lamb who would pay the price for sin by being nailed to the cross. He would solve not just Adam's corruption problem, he would pay Adam's guilt problem, too.

Colossians 2 says that, if we have repented of our sins and put our trust in Christ, God has *"forgiven us all our trespasses, by canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This he set aside, nailing it to the cross"* (Colossians 2:13-14).

Jesus perfectly ruled on the divine Father's behalf by going to the cross and paying the penalty a people so that they could be saved. Then the Father raised him from the dead, defeating sin and death, and gave him all authority. Matthew 28:18: *"All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me."* And what is the first thing this one with all authority do for the people he won? He commissions them. He gives them a mission.

#### **E. The Church**

And it's here we come to episode 5: the church. And here is the mission that Jesus gives us:

*"Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."*

What is the mission of the church? Well, in this narrower sense, we have to say the church's mission is to make disciples of all nations, to baptize, and to teach everything that Jesus commanded. Our job is to point the way to salvation.

And we must start here because a lesson of the Old Testament is that there is a way that seems right to a man, but that way leads to death. So we're surrounded by people who think they are walking in the right way, but they're walking toward a cliff.

*You've got to tell them!* "You're walking toward a cliff! You will be dashed upon the rocks. Please stop walking that way!"

It is utterly insufficient to walk up to a person who is walking toward a cliff and to love them in your heart, to hug them, to give them your clothes, to prepare a meal for them, to give them

medical aid, to live as the transformed humanity without saying anything. You *must must must* open your mouth and say, "You are walking toward a cliff. Please repent of your direction. Turn away from direction."

So, at the heart of the church's mission is to speak words. To call people to repentance. To preach the gospel. To say, "Salvation this way!" If we don't, the rest of what we do really is for naught.

Going back to our earlier quote from Beale, it is through life **and words**:

*"All believers in Christ are priests whose service reflect God's presence to others through their life and words."* (Beale, p. 122)

And this message is to go to all the world, rather than being like Israel and waiting for the Gentiles to stream into Jerusalem, the church is to go to the nations. And that is ultimately how the borders of Eden are expanded until ultimately "...the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the LORD as the waters cover the sea." (Hab. 2:14)

## **F. Glory**

Episode 6: Glory. One day, says the book of Philippians, every knee will bow and every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord. There will no longer be the need to make disciples because all will know that Jesus is Lord. And they will know that to their endless joy, or to their endless torment. We will either bow in worship, or we will bow in defeat.

In the meantime, of course, the mission of the church is to tell people this good news and to make disciples. The good news solves both the guilt problem and the corruption problem.

## **III. How Do We Put the Two Stories Together?**

So what's the answer: is the mission of the church broad or narrow? And how do we put all this together.

As we think about the mission of the church, we need to put the two charges of *proclaiming the gospel* and *living as the true humanity* together. We need the narrow answer and we need the broad answer. We need both stories. At the center of our mission is proclaiming the gospel and making disciples. Surrounding that center is the backdrop of a transformed community.

How exactly do we put these two stories together?

Well, I think we get a little hint in the salt and light passage that I read to you earlier from Matthew 5: "*You are the salt of the earth...You are the light of the world...let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven.*" (Matt. 5:13-16).

Okay, so my whole life needs to be salty, or distinct. My whole life needs to be a light. But how is it that people will know to associate my life with the Father in heaven? Maybe they'll just think I'm a nice guy. But Matthew 5 poses a question for us: *What connects my life to the Father in heaven? How do people know that I belong to the "we" of Christianity?*

Jesus answers that question in Matthew 16 and 18 and 28, when he gives first Peter and then local churches that authority to bind on earth what's bound in heaven and loose on earth what's loosed in heaven, and then gives us the tool of baptism in order to bind and loose. It's our baptism into membership in the local church, which then associates our names with heaven.

In other words, for me to fulfill my Matthew 5, all-of-life job of displaying the image of the Father in heaven by being salt and light, I need to be formally affirmed as a disciple by being baptized into membership in a church.

The broad mission, again, depends upon fulfilling the narrow mission. You might even say the narrow mission has to come first. You have to share the gospel with someone so that they get saved, and then you have to give them the Jesus nametag through baptism in order for people to know that their lives speak for Jesus. I don't know you are representing Jesus unless you have the Jesus nametag. So you have to be baptized into a church. See?

So what is the mission of the church? I want to answer that question like this:

The mission of the church as a corporate actor is the Great Commission. It's the narrow answer. It's to make disciples. It's to share the gospel, and then to baptize into membership all those who repent and believe, and then to teach them everything Jesus commanded. To the extent that we, Capitol Hill Baptist Church, all work together by raising money, by hiring pastors, by spending time together as a collective whole, our job is to make disciples and to equip one another to make disciples.

But this is only the first half of my answer to the question about the mission of the church.

The mission of the church as its individual members is Great Commandment, which is another way to speak about living as the true humanity—loving God with heart, mind, soul, and strength, and loving our neighbor as ourselves. This involves imaging God in word and deed. It involves not just teaching everything Jesus commanded, but obeying everything Jesus commanded. It doesn't involve less than the Great Commission, but it does involve more.

So: The mission of the church is:

As a corporate actor	→	The Great Commission
As its individual members	→	The Great Commandment

#### **IV. What Does This Mean for You and Your Life's Mission?**

Last question: what does this mean for you as you seek to fulfill the mission God has given you in life?

There are three basic lessons I want you to take away from all of this. This is your mission, should you choose to accept it.

##### **A. The first step of the Christian life is to be baptized into membership in a church.**



Listen to the Great Commission once again: “Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.”

So we go and make disciples. How? By baptizing and teaching. That is, by identifying ourselves with Christ and Christ’s people? And by instruction.

You see that in your handout: identification and instruction. We’re baptized into the name of Father, Son, and Spirit. We get the Jesus name tag through baptism into church membership. Then we’re instructed in the life of the church.

And this primary work of instruction has clear implications for what we expect to accomplish with our church budget and through staff time.

Of course if our profession and our life begin to contradict one another in unrepentant fashion, Jesus tells the church to remove us from membership in the church as an act of discipline.

Do you see then how our membership and discipline processes play a crucial role in the churches evangelizing and disciple making work?

A second main take away:

**B. Acting together as a church, we prioritize preaching the gospel to those on the inside and reaching the unreached on the outside.**

The most important thing we do when we gather as a church is to preach the gospel. The most important thing for the people we set aside as pastors is to preach and teach the gospel. The most important thing we do with our collected offering is pay our pastors, maintain the space in which we can meet to hear Jesus’ instruction, and send out missionaries. In one sense, all of us our missionaries to our various homes and work spaces. More traditionally, we label “missionaries” those people who feel specially called to cross national and language boundaries to share the gospel with people who have never heard it. And we work together to sponsor those missionaries.

**C. Your day-to-day mission as a church member is to represent King Jesus as the transformed humanity in all of your deeds.**

Back to Genesis 1:28: “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth.”

Does this mean we’re to exploit, oppress, dominate? Not if we’re going to subdue and rule like God does. God’s rule creates life, not abuse and use life.

So every Christian should move into some domain to be what Adam should have been. You move into a classroom, a business manager’s office, a playground, a kitchen, a canvas, an algebra problem. And you are called to subdue and rule over that domain on God’s behalf by creating, bring life and order and purposes and good. You are to use your decision-making power authority to *promote the lives of others*. To serve.

- Like a gardner who works to bring life from the soil, move out into the domains of architecture and engineering and science and art and commerce and law and governance and space travel, bring order, give shape, create, and in all of this, serve.
- Plant God's flag in every domain of life as vice kings. Boldly go where no man has gone—to bring God's rule glory to that domain.

A third take-away lesson:

**D. Your day-to-day mission as a church member is to represent King Jesus as the transformed humanity with your words.**

If we only go with our deeds, you will only draw attention to yourself. To plant the flag for God's sake you must speak words about God. You must identity yourself as Christian. Apart from that, all your work is, in one sense, for nothing. Because the goal is to help people see him. Again, you're a mirror.

One way or another, we should work to share the good news about Jesus. We pray for this especially as a church on Sunday nights. We should also be praying about this throughout the week.

**E. For the sake of your mission, you need your fellow church members throughout the week, and they need you.**

We need one another for accountability, for encouragement, for instruction.

If we're going to live as the new humanity, we need to know how to live not just as godly, pious individuals. We need to know how to live together in peace and joy and encouragement. We need opportunities to practice patience and kindness and self-control together. As Mark Dever often says, you can't really exercise the fruit of the Spirit on a desert island. No, it's in the life of the church where we really learn to do that for one another.

What is the mission of the church?

**The mission of the church is to be a light among the nations by proclaiming the gospel of Jesus Christ, living as the true humanity and a transformed community, and inviting the nations into that light and transformation.**

*Is that what this local church, The Heights Church, should do?* Yes. We are to proclaim the gospel and live together as the true humanity.