

ON MISSION with JESUS
Seeing Through a Kingdom Lens
Acts 17:26-28 and Jeremiah 29:1-9
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Each of us has been created by God with a deep-seated desire for meaning and purpose. Our need to understand why we're here and what our purpose in life is lies at the core of who we are. Pastor Rick Warren, who recently retired, tapped into this longing with his book "The Purpose Driven Life." Published in 2002, the book quickly became a world-wide sensation. As of 2020, 50 million copies of the book have been sold in 85 languages, making it one of the best-selling nonfiction books in history. The simple premise of the book is that none of us is here by chance. God uniquely designed and created us, and He has a purpose for each of us.

Interestingly, Warren's book is grounded in Biblical truth at a time when Christianity and the truths of Scripture seem to be falling out of favor in our culture. Starting with the Creation account at the beginning of Genesis and throughout the New Testament, the Bible has much to say about God's purpose for his people, and one of the places where this is most clearly seen is in Paul's sermon to the residents of Athens in Acts 17. Paul's sermon in the Greek capitol city of Athens is one of the most famous in the New Testament.

Last September, Bill Strausbaugh and I had the opportunity to travel to Greece and Ephesus in Turkey on a tour called "In the Footsteps of Paul," which provided us with the opportunity to see places where Paul traveled on his missionary journeys across Greece. On the last day of our tour, we went to the highest point in Greece's capitol city of Athens, where the acropolis, the Parthenon, and the Temple of Athena are located.

While on the Acropolis, we had the opportunity to climb Mars Hill, an outcropping of rock that reaches a height of 20–30 feet, where the ruling elders of Athens would go to announce decisions they had made. Mars Hill was also a place where speeches were given, and it was from this hill that Paul preached.

In Acts 17, we learn that Paul was waiting in Athens for his ministry partners Silas and Timothy. The trio had been separated after they encountered persecution in Berea, which led the believers to hurry Paul out of the city for his safety. While he waited for Silas and Timothy in

Athens, Paul was distressed to see that this beautiful city was filled with idols. As was his custom, the apostle began to speak to the Jews and God-fearing Greeks in the Jewish synagogue. While Paul was speaking about Jesus, some of the pagan Greeks began asking him questions about what he was saying. So, Paul stood up and began to preach. I'll begin reading at verse 22 of Acts 17.

Paul then stood up in the meeting of the Areopagus and said: "People of Athens! I see that in every way you are very religious. ²³ For as I walked around and looked carefully at your objects of worship, I even found an altar with this inscription: TO AN UNKNOWN GOD. So you are ignorant of the very thing you worship—and this is what I am going to proclaim to you.

²⁴ "The God who made the world and everything in it is the Lord of heaven and earth and does not live in temples built by human hands. ²⁵ And he is not served by human hands, as if he needed anything. Rather, he himself gives everyone life and breath and everything else. – Acts 17:22-25

And in verses 26–28, Paul continued his sermon with these words that I want you to pay special attention to. These verses clearly highlight God's intentionality in creating us.

From one man he made all the nations, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and he marked out their appointed times in history and the boundaries of their lands. God did this so that they would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him, though he is not far from any one of us. 'For in him we live and move and have our being. – Acts 17:26-28

I was very familiar with Paul's sermon, but a number of years ago, a pastor friend showed the verses I just read to you in a new light that I've never forgotten. My friend pointed out that in this passage, Paul highlights the fact that God not only created us, He marked out appointed times in history as to where and when we would live, and He did all of this so that

people would seek Him and reach out to Him and find Him. In other words, you and I live in the time and place we do as part of God's master plan to lead people into a relationship with Him. You weren't created by chance, and you don't live when and where you do randomly. God has created you and me with a specific purpose in mind.

My goal in this series, called "On Mission with Jesus," is to reinforce for each of us the truth that God's desire for you and for me is that we would partner with Him in his mission of reaching people who don't know Him so that they might know the joy and hope that comes from being in relationship with Jesus. To accomplish that goal, I'll be sharing Biblical foundations from the Old and New Testament, you'll be hearing a variety of people from our church share their story of what it looks like for them to be on mission with Jesus, and I'll be sharing from my own life. Here's a video of Chuck and Pam Arnold sharing how they live on mission with Jesus through serving in the ministry At the Cross Recovery.

[Chuck & Pam Arnold's Testimony](#)

Thanks, Chuck and Pam. I appreciate your willingness to share with us this morning, and I'm grateful for your service in At the Cross Recovery. At the Cross is a wonderful ministry that ministers to people who are part of McBIC and other churches and to some people who aren't connected with a church. It's great to hear how your service with At the Cross Recovery has provided a platform for you to use your unique gifts, passions and experience to partner with Jesus in his mission of reaching people.

We're going to look now at the book of Jeremiah. Last week, I read Jeremiah 28, and this week, we turn our focus to verses 1–9 of Jeremiah 29. To refresh your memory if you were here last week and to give you a bit of context if you weren't able to be with us, God's people had just been routed by the Babylonians and deported from their home city of Jerusalem to the pagan city of Babylon. The Jews were hoping that their stay in Babylon would be short so they could quickly return to their homeland and resume their normal lives, and a false prophet named Hananiah "prophesied" exactly what they hoped to hear. He told them God would deliver them from the Babylonians, and within two years, they would return to Jerusalem. God,

however, told Jeremiah that Hananiah's prophesy was false and that the Jews were actually going to be in Babylon for 70 years.

This may seem like a strange passage to preach from in a series on the topic of living missionally, but I see some important parallels for us. God's people have always found it tempting to withdraw from the culture around them and to gather in holy huddles with people who believe like we do. Huddling up with people who believe the same as we do and waiting together for heaven to arrive feels comfortable and safe, but the Bible is clear that God's heart is for us to impact the world around us, not just to insulate ourselves from it. In the Lord's Prayer, Jesus prayed, "Your kingdom come. Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven." As followers of Jesus, you and I are given the charge by Jesus to see that our Heavenly Father's will is done on earth as it is in heaven. So while we might find it attractive at times to isolate ourselves from people around us who think and believe differently than we do, the Bible is clear that Jesus' call for us is to be salt and light. Salt only flavors and preserves food that it is in close proximity to, and light only shines and gives direction when it is surrounded by darkness. Similarly, impacting people with Jesus' love requires us to be in relationship with people who don't know Jesus.

In strong contrast to the words of the false prophet Hananiah, listen to the words God's prophet Jeremiah spoke to the people of Israel in Babylon. I'll read verses 1–9 of Jeremiah chapter 29.

This is the text of the letter that the prophet Jeremiah sent from Jerusalem to the surviving elders among the exiles and to the priests, the prophets and all the other people Nebuchadnezzar had carried into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon. ² (This was after King Jehoiachin and the queen mother, the court officials and the leaders of Judah and Jerusalem, the skilled workers and the artisans had gone into exile from Jerusalem.) ³ He entrusted the letter to Elasah son of Shaphan and to Gemariah son of Hilkiyah, whom Zedekiah king of Judah sent to King Nebuchadnezzar in Babylon. It said:

⁴ This is what the LORD Almighty, the God of Israel, says to all those I carried into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon: ⁵ "Build houses and settle down; plant gardens and eat what

they produce. ⁶ Marry and have sons and daughters; find wives for your sons and give your daughters in marriage, so that they too may have sons and daughters. Increase in number there; do not decrease. ⁷ Also, seek the peace and prosperity of the city to which I have carried you into exile. Pray to the LORD for it, because if it prospers, you too will prosper.” ⁸ Yes, this is what the LORD Almighty, the God of Israel, says: “Do not let the prophets and diviners among you deceive you. Do not listen to the dreams you encourage them to have. ⁹ They are prophesying lies to you in my name. I have not sent them,” declares the LORD. – Jeremiah 29:1-9

Hananiah’s false prophesy instructed God’s people to separate themselves, grit their teeth, close their eyes and hang on, hoping for the two years of captivity in Babylon to quickly pass, but God spoke a very different message to his people through his prophet. Jeremiah told the Jews in captivity in Babylon to build houses, plant gardens, marry and have children, and increase in number as a people. I especially like verse 7: “Seek the peace and prosperity of the city to which I have carried you into exile. Pray to the Lord for it, because if it prospers, you too will prosper.” It’s tempting for us to focus on the things we view as more spiritual and to downplay the things we view as less important, but God’s call to his people was to seek the peace and prosperity of the community in which they lived, understanding that when their community was blessed, they too would be blessed. I see a strong connection between verse 7 and Jesus’ prayer, “Your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.” The correlation between what’s spiritual and what’s material is much stronger than we often realize. We may be an accountant, an engineer, a teacher, a stay-at-home parent, a student, or a salesperson, but our job or our station in life has great potential for kingdom impact.

I want to ask Derek Mauldin to come up and share how his job as a financial advisor gives him a platform for being on mission with Jesus.

Derek Mauldin

Thanks, Derek, for being willing to share with us this morning. I love that you view your job as a financial advisor as a platform God has given you to minister to people with Jesus' love.

I've titled today's message "Seeing Through a Kingdom Lens," because while our tendency is to divide our lives into spiritual and non-spiritual components, everything we do has kingdom potential. One of the journeys God has had me on as a pastor is understanding that every person I interact with, every situation I find myself in, and every circumstance I encounter is an opportunity to share Jesus' love and compassion for people. When I started out in pastoral ministry in 1991, I viewed what I did in my role as a youth pastor in the church as having spiritual significance but failed to understand how important other facets of my life could be. Over the course of three decades of ministry, I've come to understand that my interactions with people outside of my official role as pastor are just as important if not more so than what I do in my role as McBIC's lead pastor.

This understanding really crystallized for me five or six years ago when Mechanicsburg Area High School walked through the tragedy of a student taking his own life. When I learned of the suicide, I contacted the school to see if I or our church could be of assistance in any way. I was encouraged to bring several of our pastors to the office. When we arrived, we were asked to walk around the lunchroom and be available to have conversations with students who were struggling with what had taken place. We were able to have some meaningful conversations, but I was told later by a school administrator that what was most important to students and staff was our presence. Toward the end of our time at the school that day, our district superintendent pulled me aside and said, "Thank you, Dr. Lebo (they like calling me "Dr." in my role as a school board member), for taking off your school board hat and putting on your pastor's hat for us today." Without thinking, I replied, "It's all one hat to me."

Have you had the experience of saying something quickly without thinking and then realizing later how profound what you said actually was? Admittedly, that's not the way it usually works for me. My typical experience is to say something quickly and then realize how foolish it was and wishing I had stopped to think before I spoke, but on this occasion, I believe God was speaking through me before I fully had the opportunity to think through what I was saying. "It's all one hat to me" sums up the approach to life God has shown me: seeing my life

and all that I do as seamless, rather than “I serve the church as a pastor here, and I’m a father and husband over here, I’m a school board member twice a month at our meetings and whenever an issue arises in our district, and when I cycle or read or garden, I’m just mindlessly recreating.” Whether I’m a pastor, a husband or father, a gardener or cyclist, a school board member, or a neighbor, I always wear the hat of being a follower of Jesus. Wearing that hat means I constantly have opportunities to be on mission with Jesus, sharing his love and truth with people who desperately need it.

In one sense, we all wear multiple hats as we juggle a variety of roles related to work, family, and friends, but when it comes to our faith and sharing Jesus’ love with others, we wear the hat of being a Jesus follower in every role and situation in which we find ourselves whether at work, at school, with our family, in our neighborhood, or wherever it is we hang out.

As we wrap up our time today, I’d like you to reflect on this question: **“What is God speaking to you through his Holy Spirit as you reflect on the fact that you wear one hat as a follower of Jesus?”** Stated another way, **“What does it look for you to view every aspect of your life through a kingdom lens?”** I’m reminded of the Apostle Paul’s words in Colossians 3:17. After telling his readers to let the peace of Christ rule in their lives and to encourage each other spiritually, Paul says, “And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.” You and I have the opportunity to bring glory to Jesus in everything we do!