

# **THE MISSION**

Part Two: “Displaying the Gospel with Our Lives”

Romans 12:1–2

By David A. Ritchie

Sunday, August 15, 2021 (Ordinary Time)

## **Communication**

Good morning, and welcome to Redeemer Christian Church. My name is David, and I am one of the pastors here at Redeemer. We are grateful that you are here, and if you are a guest, we would love to know that you are here. If you would, please fill out a connect card (found on the back of the pew in front of you) and drop it in the giving box on your way out today.

Also, I wanted to let you know that Crossway Publishers recently donated just over a hundred copies of the book *Gentle and Lowly* by Dane Ortlund to our church. I read it last year, and it was the best book I read in 2020. It’s a profoundly comforting book about the character and nature of Jesus. Feel free to pick one up on the coffee table. We only request that you limit yourself to one book per family.

Before we turn to the Scriptures, there are a few things I want to share with you.

I want you know that our leadership is watching our city’s health situation very closely, especially as our school year is getting ready to start. It is true that the new Delta Variant has caused a massive increase of COVID cases in our city. In fact, last Thursday, the medical leaders of our city held a press conference in which they said that hospital capacity is at a dangerous place, due to not only space but reduced staff. They also stressed that 82% of everyone who is hospitalized with COVID right now is unvaccinated.

This situation creates tons of challenges and questions, since public gatherings are a big part of what we do. But we have been here before, and we know we can weather these storms together. And we will do all that we can do to ensure that we can continue to gather for worship and continue the mission of declaring and displaying the gospel.

With that said, there are a few things I want to stress at this particular moment. The first is this: if you are sick or your child is sick, in this this season it is very important to stay home and watch our services online. If we get each other or our kids sick, we are not just compromising each other’s health, we are compromising each other’s ability to work and provide and income, and we are compromising our ability to even gather and minister as a church.

I'm was in contact with a local senior pastor of a church our size who had to weigh closing their church until Labor Day because of an outbreak on their staff. We do not want that.

That's why our staff is back to masking during our indoor gatherings. That's why our volunteers are back to masking. That's why our community's medical leaders are recommending that all people – both vaccinated and unvaccinated – mask in public settings at this time.

Many of you are vaccinated, and that helps protect our congregation, especially against hospitalization. However, none of our kids under twelve are vaccinated, and we need to be mindful of that reality when there is a surge in our city.

I'm not excited about wearing a mask again. I don't want to wear a mask again. But I want to do everything I can to keep preaching, to keep worshiping together, and keep moving forward together.

Ever since the lockdown of spring of 2020, we have never had to stop meeting, and we've never had an outbreak in our services. And I want to keep it that way. We want to keep on mission, keep ministering, and keep declaring and displaying the gospel, which is our mission.

And it is to that mission that we now turn to in Scripture. So, if you would, please open your Bibles to Romans chapter 12. And let us stand for the reading of God's word.

### **Scripture Reading**

*"I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect" (Romans 12:1–2, ESV).*

### **Prayer**

Heavenly Father, we pray for your mercy in a challenging time. We pray for mercy upon our Christian brothers and sisters in Afghanistan who are now enduring warfare and rule of the Taliban. We pray for our brothers and sisters in Haiti who have endured yet another earthquake, and we pray for Christian Relief Fund, as they attempt to respond to this disaster. We pray for our own city, as COVID cases spike and a new school year begins. In times of darkness and division, we pray that you would shine your light. Today, would your word give us comfort and strength. Today, would your Holy Spirit form us to be a renewed people who display the gospel to a world that is hurting. In Jesus's mighty name, we pray.

*AMEN.*

## Introduction

We are in the middle of a short sermon series in which we are exploring The Mission of Redeemer Christian Church. We are taking some time to rediscover and re-focus our church family on our shared mission as a church.

Before I became the Lead Pastor of Redeemer Christian Church, I served as a pastor of a College and Young Adult ministry. It was a time in life when I was coming into clarity on a lot of important questions about my Christian faith. I was asking questions like, “*What is the gospel? What is the church? What is the purpose of the church?*”

As I delved into the words of Scripture, I saw two themes that stuck out to me.

I saw that the church was called to faithfully proclaim the gospel message. The church needed to treasure the “whole counsel” of God’s word (cf. Acts 20:27). In other words, the church wasn’t called to entertain people or give people what they think they wanted in the name of Jesus. The church, rather, is to declare the gospel that people need for salvation.

But as I studied Scripture, I also saw clearly that mission of the church doesn’t stop with mere words and beliefs. What we believe to be true must be evidenced in the way that we live our lives. In other words, Christians are called not only to gospel belief, but also to gospel transformation. If the gospel is true, it demands nothing less than a radical transformation of how we are called to live and love. *Merely saying the right words can be easy to fake. But a changed life is difficult to counterfeit.*

As the Apostle John once said, “*Little children, let us not love in word or talk but in deed and in truth*” (1 John 3:18). In other words, I believed that we as the church are to live visible differently before a watching world.

I began to be convinced, that the church had a dual calling to both declare the gospel and display the gospel. My heart began to burn for a vision of church that valued both the declaration of the gospel and the displaying of the gospel.

In fact, I believed that if we truly take the Bible seriously, it drives us to a vibrant, outwardly visible love for our God, our neighbor, and place we have been sent. The truth of the gospel word compels and even fuels our mission. And, likewise, if we want to truly love our neighbor, we need to love them enough share the gospel with them.

In other words, not only *can* declaring and displaying the gospel go together, they *must* go together. By the grace of God, that is the type of church we are, and the type of church we are always becoming. We believe so much it is part of our mission statement:

*Redeemer Christian Church exists to declare the gospel of Jesus Christ with our words and display the gospel of Jesus Christ with our lives to our neighbors and to the nations.*

In this sermon series, I want unpack what this mission statement means, how this mission flows from the word of God, and what this mission looks like in real life.

Today, we are going to talk about the second aspect of our mission: *“Displaying the Gospel with Our Lives.”*

## **Teaching and Exhortation**

### **1.) The Necessity of Displaying the Gospel.**

The story of the Bible is God’s story of redemption.

God created all things perfectly. Creation was fractured and broken because of sin. God set forth a plan of redemption.

God was going to rescue his creation. But it has always been the plan of God to work in and through his people.

God rescues and redeems Israel from slavery to Egypt to be his people. But their purpose is not simply to be the blessed people of God. God blesses them to be a blessing to the nations (cf. Gen 12:2–3). God reveals himself to Israel so that he might be revealed through them to a watching world.

This is the prophetic calling of the people of God. We see this clearly in Isaiah. God says through Isaiah, *“...It is too light a thing that you should be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob and to bring back the preserved of Israel; I will make you as a light for the nations, that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth”* (Isa 49:6).

For Isaiah, there was no divorcing one’s belief in God from faithful obedience that displayed that belief in God in matters like serving the poor, the hungry, and the oppressed (cf. Isa 58:6–7). This is what it looked like for the righteousness of God to shine as a light (Isa 58:8).

What I want you to see clearly here is that there is both a *communal* and *missional* design that has always been integral to God’s people. This communal and missional design of God’s people exists now as well.

As God redeemed Israel from slavery to Egypt, God has redeemed all who believe in Jesus from the slavery of sin. And as a people who have been redeemed by grace, we are to live lives that give glory to our Redeemer.

The church of the New Testament is seen as the continuation and expansion of the people of God. And Jesus tells this people: *“You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven”* (Matt 5:14–16).

In other words, what we believe to be true about God *must* be reflected in our lives before the watching world.

*Christians commend and give credibility to the gospel when our lives line up with the gospel. But likewise, when we live lives of compromise and hypocrisy, we dishonor the gospel truth we claim to believe.*

You might say, “But the Bible says the gospel is offensive and that Jesus is a stumbling block to unbelievers.” That is true. But I simply want to point out *there is a very real and important distinction between the truth of gospel causing offense and the hypocrisy of Christians causing an offense.*

We are to be a distinct and holy people that show the world a way of life that is only possible if the resurrection of Jesus is true. In the midst of an age of anxiety and darkness, we are to “shine as lights in the world” (Phil 2:15). As Stanley Hauerwas and William Willimon have written in their book *Resident Aliens*: “*Christianity is an invitation to be a part of an alien people who make a difference because they see something that cannot otherwise be seen without Christ.*”<sup>1</sup>

## **2.) How We Display the Gospel.**

This part of our mission is less about what we do and more about who we are becoming as people. We want to display the gospel with the outreaches and mission trips and events that we do. But even more we want our gospel communities and families and individuals to be known as people who display the gospel.

So, let’s define some terms.

*The gospel is the good news of the kingdom of God having come through Jesus’s life, death, and resurrection.*

*To display the gospel means that this gospel frames, motivates, and empowers every facet of our life in a way that is unignorable to a watching world.*

To put it very simply: *To display the gospel is to make a direct and visible connection between what we believe and how we live.*

I’ll give just a few explicit New Testament examples in which a display of the gospel is rooted in gospel belief. That means I’m going to throw lots of Scripture your way, just you can see how much of this idea is rooted in the minds of the New Testament authors.

### *Radical Forgiveness and Love*

---

<sup>1</sup> Stanley Hauerwas and William H. Willimon, *Resident Aliens: Life in the Christian Colony* (Nashville: Abington: 1989), 24.

Christians are called to forgive one another. We're even called to forgive our enemies. But why do we forgive? Is because we just like being nice people? Not exactly. Sometimes our suffering is great, and forgiveness is costly. That means we need something to motivate our forgiveness at a deep heart-level.

This is what the Apostle Paul says should motivate our forgiveness: *"Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive"* (Col 3:12–13).

Christians are a forgiven people that are to take that belief of forgiveness and to have it reflected in their life.

A few years ago, a Dallas police officer mistakenly shot and killed a man named Botham Jean (Bōtham John) in his own apartment. As a result, she was found guilty of murder and sentenced to prison. At the conclusion of the trial, Botham Jean's younger brother Brandt took the stand and did something that astonished the world. He publicly forgave his brother's murderer and asked the judge for permission to hug her. When he did this, he made an explicit connection with the love he showed her and the gospel of Jesus.

*And an outrage and vengeance-driven world for a brief moment fell silent before the divine power of amazing grace. What Christians believe was directly and visibly connected to how this one Christian lived.*

### *Radical Reconciliation and Hospitality*

We live in a cultural moment with a lot of racial polarization and division. This is by no means a new situation in the history of the world, but it is something that is uniquely in front of us at the moment because of the new reality of social media.

In the New Testament era, there was plenty of racial division as well. And people tended only to relate with people of their own culture. But one place where people of different cultures came together to worship and share meals together was the church.

There was a common situation among Jewish and Gentile Christians, in which sometimes different cultural customs rubbed each other the wrong way and could even cause division. The Apostle Paul saw this as an opportunity to display the gospel. He knew the world looked like racial division, but the church needed to look different.

So, he told the Romans Christians to refrain judging one another, to serve one another, to refuse to despise one another, and to instead welcome one another – even from different cultures – as fellow servants of Jesus. He says, *"Therefore welcome one another as Christ has welcomed you, for the glory of God"* (Rom 15:7).

That's why we have often participated in endeavors for racial reconciliation in our city. It's certainly not because we are trying to fit into "woke" culture. Instead, we do this

because the gospel calls us to reconciliation. We want Christians of different culture and skin colors who are united in Christ to be a visible reality in a world that is looking for answers.

### Radical Generosity

We believe part of Christian worship is financially giving to support the mission of the church. This is a practice that has existed since the New Testament era. But why do we give?

Some people talk about giving like as if it were a stock option, as if we give a little bit so that we can get more material blessing from God. And while we do believe it is more blessed to give than to receive (Acts 20:35), there is a deeper and more ultimate motivation than our own self-interest.

Look at the rationale the Apostle Paul gives the church in Corinth as he invites them to financially support the church in Jerusalem: *“For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you by his poverty might become rich”* (2 Cor 8:9).

It takes financial resources to have a building where people can gather for ministry. It takes financial resources to have a staff that visits people at the hospital, gives counseling to hurting people, and organizes ministry. It takes resources to plant churches, drill water wells, and fund medical missions. And as a church, we have done all those things because people have given money to fund the mission.

We are in a season when we need that resourcing so the gospel can go forward. If you haven't given to support this ministry, but you have benefited from this ministry, I challenge you to give, so that someone else might be reached. If you have given financially, but your giving has been haphazard or inconsistent, I want to challenge you to give consistently because the needs don't stop, nor does the mission.

Why do we give? We give because Jesus was given to us.

Financial giving that is sacrificial, generous, joyous, and consistent is a way we can display the gospel.

### Radical Faithfulness in Marriage

One of the more contested aspects of Christian morality in today's culture is the Christian view of sex, singleness, and marriage. But we need to understand that the ethics surrounding these topics are not outdated, arbitrary restrictions on our freedom. The moral commands of God are the words of a wise heavenly father that are for the flourishing and joy of his people

Even more the ethical commands about sexuality flow from the gospel. This is particularly evident in how Ephesians 5 connects its vision of marriage to the gospel:

*“Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord...Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her...This mystery [of marriage] is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church” (Eph 5:22, 25, 32).*

I’ve told this story before, but I have a very dear friend who once worked with me in ministry in the early days of this church. He ended up leaving his role here to study law, and today he is a practicing attorney in Kansas City.

When he went to law school, he had just studied a lot about evangelism, neighborhood outreach, and missional living. He was excited at the opportunity to share his faith. I asked him after his first year in law school about what was the most effective way to share his faith.

He said, by far, the most effective witness he had to the gospel was his marriage. He said law school tended to not be good for most marriages. Many of the people he studied with were very worldly people who mocked the fact that my friend used to be in ministry, but over time they noticed that he truly loved his wife and his kids. He wouldn’t talk negatively about his wife, and he wouldn’t talk about how attractive he found other women. The three other men of his study group began to notice. And it was when some of those men experienced hardship in marriage and came to him for help, he was able to share the gospel with them.

His marriage was the strongest testimony to the gospel before those that were close to him. In this case, his gospel display gave credibility to his gospel declaration.

When we display the gospel with our lives, we are like lights shining in the darkness. When we display the gospel, we are displaying a new way to be human. Jesus is coming one day to make all things new, and we are called to give witness to that truth with our lives.

As the Apostle Paul writes in 2 Corinthians 5: *“Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come. All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation. Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God” (2 Cor 5:17–20).*

### **3.) How God Displayed the Gospel to Us.**

The ministry of preaching is crucial, but it is not the only aspect of the Christian mission. We knew that by simply looking at Jesus.

J. Gresham Machen once wrote that Jesus did not come to us as a teacher, but a *Redeemer*. His redemptive power lay in what he *did* and what he *displayed*.



Jesus displayed that God has come to man when man was unable to come to God through his incarnation.

Jesus displayed the compassion of God through acts of mercy.

Jesus displayed the power of God through his miracles.

Jesus displayed the extent of his grace at the cross.

Jesus displayed his victory over the powers of sin, Satan, and death in his resurrection.

Jesus displayed the faithfulness of God by promising to return and make all things new.

Jesus has displayed the eternal glory of God perfectly. Our job is to display Jesus.

As a church, we want everything we do to be a display of the gospel. One clear example of this is the Mexico mission trip we take each year to Juarez to build houses for indigent families with Casas Por Cristo. To some it might look like random acts of goodwill, but there is more to it than that. There is a distinction between humanitarian aid and acts of love that display the gospel.

And in the Casas Por Cristo trip, we are displaying the truth about the one who left a place of comfort and safety to come down into world brokenness. We are displaying the paid a cost for a gift that cannot be paid back. We tell the family this at the commitment of every new home. We tell them that we have loved because he has first loved us. And through this, I have been on trips where people come to faith.

We cannot earn the grace of God and salvation. But we can respond in worship with our lives. We can allow the gospel to motivate what we do in every fiber our being. Our lives can bear witness to Jesus.

As our Scripture reading this morning said, *“I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect”* (Rom 12:1–2).

All of the Christian’s life is a “therefore.” All of life is a response to the gospel.

So, Redeemer Christian Church, may we respond. May we know the gospel. May we treasure the gospel. May we allow the gospel to move us so deeply that we display it with our lives.

AMEN.

## Gospel Community Discussion Starters

1. Redeemer Christian Church exists to **declare** the gospel of Jesus Christ with our words and to **display** the gospel of Jesus Christ with our lives to our **neighbors** and to the **nations**. What are some of the most powerful ways you have seen Christians display the gospel with their lives?
2. Read and compare Isaiah 49:6 and Matthew 5:14–16. What do these passages teach about God’s design for the people of God? Should displaying the gospel be considered optional for Christians?
3. What are some examples of how the gospel can frame, motivate, and empower us to live every facet of our lives in response to Jesus’s love for us? How might the gospel call us to practice forgiveness, generosity, and relationships differently than the world does?
4. What are some ways the Lord might be calling you to display the gospel in your everyday life?