

Sermon Brief

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December 5, 2021

Text: Acts 1:8

Title: Wintonbury Values - Ambition

Subject: The gospel is meant to be wholistic.

Complement: The gospel is meant to be shared with the whole world.

Textual Idea: The gospel is meant to be wholistic and shared with the whole world.

Sermon Idea: The gospel is meant to be wholistic and shared with the whole world.

Interrogative: Am I participating in God's mission?

Key Points:

1. **Whole Gospel:** We proclaim a holistic gospel that provides healing for humanity and renewal for all of creation. (Matthew 9:35-38; Colossians 1:19-20; Romans 8:19-21)
2. **Whole World:** We send and support people who share the good news of Jesus with people around the globe. (Romans 15:30)

What do I want people to know? I want people to know the gospel is good news for all of creation, not just human souls, and that every church should be concerned about spreading it to the entire world.

What do I want people to do? I want people to (1) consider becoming a Missionary Champion, (2) pray for 1 missionary, and (3) attend the Missions Lunch.

What need am I addressing? I am addressing the need to obey the Lord and bring the wholistic gospel to the whole world.

Wintonbury Values -Assignment

Acts 1:8

December 5, 2021

We're in a series this fall in which we're reviewing our vision and mission. Let's read them together, **(LCD) we want to see our communities transformed by God's presence. We do that by seeking to help individuals and communities experience God, become more like Jesus, discover their calling, and impact their world.** What binds us together as a community on this mission are our values. Fourteen in all. We've looked at eight so far. The first two we looked at are our authority values, **(LCD) Jesus and The Bible** – the Word of God in flesh and in writing. Next, we looked at our atmosphere values, Hospitality, making people feel welcomed, and Authenticity, being real and honest. Then we hit on the attitude we want to have which is one of Freedom, grace-based relationships, and Beloved, we're loved by God. Then we talked about our allegiance values: reverence, giving God our full attention, and discipleship, living in full devotion to Him. Next, we hit on our alignment values: life together and unity. We are to follow Christ as one community.

Last week, we focused on our assignment values: empowerment and mission. We looked at how the Lord raised up the Apostle Paul to do his life's mission...which each of us has as well! **(LCD) Here** is a picture that one of our kids did of this message. Jesus changes Paul, Paul then teach people about Jesus, Wintonbury is sending out people like arrows on their kingdom calling mission, and "we were made for a reason." Amen!

For this week, we'll be looking at our last two values. **(LCD) Looking at the word cloud**, which words stand out? Right, Whole Gospel and Whole World. Let's read these values, **(LCD) Whole Gospel: We proclaim a holistic gospel that provides healing for humanity and renewal for all of creation. Whole World: We send and support people who share the good news of Jesus with people around the globe.** Again, all of these values are aspirations, they're what we aspire to be. We want to be a church that is concerned about the whole gospel for the whole world. And we hold these two values for two reasons. One, it is God's heart; two, very few churches focus on these two as values. Let me tell you why.

Today is not really going to be a sermon. It's more of a presentation. You're going to hear from several people this morning. My job is to explain why we preach a wholistic gospel and why we're concerned for the whole world. Let's start with the whole gospel. Most of us were brought up in Western churches influenced by Western individualistic thinking. As a result, when we think of the gospel, we usually think of what I call the Billy Graham gospel. It's depicted in this illustration: **(LCD) the Bridge**. The old time gospel that all of us are sinners who need forgiveness from God. We can't find that forgiveness through good works, it only comes by trusting in Jesus' sacrifice on the cross as the payment for our sins. Believe in Jesus and you'll go to heaven when you die. That's it. Very individually focused.

Now this is all basically true and Biblical...the problem is that there is more to it than this. Jesus came preaching the gospel of the kingdom, not just the gospel of personal salvation. Again, we are very individualistic in the West, and we interpret things that way. But the gospel is bigger than just me going to heaven when I die. So much bigger! Actually, looking at the Old Testament, we can see that. I think the first strong explanation of the gospel is found in God's call to Abraham, (LCD) **"I will make you into a great nation, and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you."** Notice the repeated word, bless, barak. In the Garden of Eden, God had blessed Adam and Eve and given them a mandate to rule over God's creation, to be His representatives on earth, which is what bearing His image is all about. But they rebelled and instead were cursed. This curse affected everything: humanity's relationship with God, the physical earth, all of creation was cursed. The story of the Bible is the reversal of that curse and here, in Genesis 12, we see that God is going to do it through Abraham's line and it will be for all nations.

As you move on in the Old Testament, this blessed state gets described many times. One example is from Isaiah when he's prophesying about the coming of God's Messiah, (LCD) **"The Spirit of the Sovereign Lord is on me, because the Lord has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners..."** Note that Jews would not have spiritualized all this. God is going to restore all that's been lost and broken by the curse – spiritual, physical, emotional, relational, etc... The Jews have a word for this state of blessing: shalom – the flourishing of life in all its forms.

Of course, when Jesus comes, He quotes this passage in his first sermon. He's the shalom bringing, the curse-reverser, the blesser of the nations...and it is wholistic as we see in His ministry. Jesus' message is, (LCD) **"The time has come," he said. "The kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news!"** He preaches that the kingdom is here already, just not yet in its fullness. The coming of the kingdom is the beginning of the reversal of the curse. And Jesus' healing ministry gives people a foretaste of the ultimate fullness that is coming.

What I want you to catch is that Jesus' message is good news not just for human souls but for all creation! The Apostle Paul understood that as we see in Romans and Colossians, (LCD) **"For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the freedom and glory of the children of God." "For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross."** Notice that the creation itself needs redemption, ALL of creation, ALL things, even in the heavens.

What Jesus did at the cross was bigger than the already immense work of saving our individual souls! He began the process of reversing the curse and that means that all of

creation matters to God. Any effort that reverses brokenness, whether emotional, physical, mental, relational, or spiritual is the work of the gospel. As the old Christmas hymn goes, “Joy to the world, the Lord is come...far as the curse is found, far as the curse is found.” Our job, then, is to be people who **(LCD) bring foretastes of the kingdom of God**. Just like the ice cream taste tester spoon tells you that the ice cream is real and that it is sweet, so do we tell the world that the kingdom of God is real and sweet! We do that by preaching the gospel in word and in deed – anything that addresses brokenness in the name of Jesus, physical, emotional, spiritual, is gospel work.

An example of this wholistic approach to the gospel is what David and Bee Paul do. I’d like to call them up to share with us about their ministry to refugees. **(LCD) 3 slides**.

Thank you, David. Your presentation is a good example of the whole gospel and of our desire to be concerned about the whole world. Why the whole world? That comes from Jesus Himself. In Acts 1, before leaving to be with his Father, Jesus commissioned his disciples with these words, **(LCD) “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.”** Notice that Jesus’ instructions were to take the gospel to the whole world. So if that’s the case, why are so few churches prioritizing and valuing world missions?

My missions professor in seminary, Willard Stone, had previously been in charge of missions for the Southern Baptist denomination in Southeast Asia. He found that few churches were interested in doing anything more than sending checks to support the missionaries. The main reason was that the churches felt that they were only responsible for their part of the world. But Acts 1:8 is for all believers. Every church should be concerned about the whole world. Stone challenged us to not only send checks but also get directly involved with missions around the world.

Another reason he urged to get personally involved was because of how discouraged the missionaries are. He said that in his experience, about 40% of missionaries are not doing what their support letters say they’re doing. They make things look better than they are because they know that Americans expect results, and they don’t want to lose support. Having said that, Stone said his main frustration wasn’t with the missionaries sugar-coating their ministries; it was with the supporting churches who weren’t in touch with the missionary enough to know what was really going on!

All this deeply influenced me and upon returning from seminary, I worked with a group of people to develop our missions philosophy. The first thing we wanted to address was the random nature of who we supported. Basically, someone knew a missionary, passed on the name, and if it sounded good, we might support them. But there was no real strategy about it. I mean, there are a gazillion great missionaries to give to! How do we choose? So we decided to develop a strategy based on the whole gospel and the whole world. First, taking Acts 1:8 seriously, we determined our **(LCD) places**. Our Jerusalem is our city, Hartford. Our Judea is the region our city sits in, New England. Our Samaria is a nearby place of a different cultural origin. In the jet age, the DR is only three hours

away and we had significant involvement there so that became our Samaria. And the ends of the earth.

Next, we wanted to be wholistic in what ministries we supported, so we came up with three types, **(LCD) Prayer, Care, Share**, that matched our personal evangelism strategy. Prayer ministries are those focused on support and/or admin, care ministries are those focused on compassion and justice, and share ministries are those focused on church planting and evangelism. When you put those two together, you get our **(LCD) Missions Matrix**. Our goal is for relative balance across the matrix. As you can see, we have 32 total missionaries/outreaches that we support. Of those, 14 are foreign, outside the US. The breakout between prayer, care, share is pretty good and the breakout between the places is close to our targets of 25%, 12.5%, and 50%. Also, our missions budget shoots for those percentages too. The goal is a balanced portfolio of support that takes both the whole gospel and the whole world into account.

Along with our matrix, we've developed **(LCD) goals for missions**. And with that, I'd like to call up our Missions Chair, Fin Congdon, to talk through these with me.

- "Everyone know a little about all and a lot about one"
- Budget Support: 20% of total budget
- Missionary Champions – each missionary/outreach
- Annual Missions Conference
- Annual Focus on Praying for Persecuted Christians
- Missionary Cards – pray for a missionary
- Tim Teams: On-site visits from Wintonbury
- Sharing Events when visiting Wintonbury

So this is how we pursue our values of whole gospel and whole world. As I said, few churches value these and that is why we're privileged to have among us Candace Fish who is a missionary with our denomination. She's focused on helping churches become involved in missions. Please listen to her. **(LCD – 7 slides)**

Thank you, Candace! Lastly, I'd like you to hear from another of our missionaries who's with us this morning, **(LCD) Rick Berry**. He's going to share with us what he's up to. After that, we'll wrap up with a song and prayer.

Father, let us be world Christians who give **(LCD) a foretaste of the kingdom of God** to the whole world. Amen!

Sing "Our Father" and pray the Lord's Prayer

Invite people to the Missions Luncheon.