

# Why Keep Doing Church When the World's Not Interested?

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[ 0 : 00 ] Well, it's estimated that around the globe last year, over 10,000 churches closed their doors, shut down. Studies in the UK have recently found that the numbers of people attending church regularly are about half what they were in the 1960s.

And that's despite population growth from that time. You see, the general feeling in today's kind of post-modern, post-church, post-Christian societies is that church is really not that important anymore.

It was for our parents, but, you know, church is not something I need anymore. That's the general feeling. You know, people today are quite happy living without church, aren't they? The majority of our community are not at church right now.

They're walking in the park or playing sport or sleeping late, just basically getting ready for a busy week in the office. With no thought about going to church, no desire to go to church, and no need to go to church.

And that's becoming a growing trend in our culture, I'm sure you've seen, and the people that you know. And it leads us to wonder, if it carries on that way, then will St. Mark's be around in 20 years' time?

[ 1 : 08 ] Or will it become like an old church building that I passed on the other day on the main road that's now become a used car parts store? Or will it become maybe like this church in the States that's now a basketball court?

St. Mark's might be a decent basketball court, I don't know. And if that's the case, if that's where church is going in our culture, why not just save ourselves the trouble and close down right now? I mean, we're not growing that fast. We can barely sustain a single service on Sunday. Why not call it a day? Why not call our missionaries up and say, hey, Rod, don't worry. You can pack your bags and come home, get a regular job.

We're not doing this anymore. You know, it's not too late for me to go back into business and get a pretty decent career. Why don't we do that? Why are we still here? Why do we still carry on doing what we're doing when most people really aren't that interested anymore?

Well, we find the answer to that question right here in the book of Romans. Because it's in Paul's letter to the Romans and in his introduction here, the Roman Christians that he's writing to, that he starts his letter with an explanation of why he does what he does as an apostle.

[ 2 : 16 ] Why he makes all the sacrifices he makes and goes through all that he goes through and all the resistance that he gets, why he does it. And he starts the letter to the Romans with the reason for why he does what he does and why churches like the Roman church, like St. Mark's, need to keep doing what we're doing, even when people aren't that interested.

And so I want you carefully to listen to Paul's reasons for doing what he does. Have a look from verse 1. Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle and set apart for the gospel of God, the gospel he promised beforehand through his prophets in the Holy Scriptures regarding his son, who as to his earthly life was a descendant of David, and who through the spirit of holiness was appointed the son of God in power by his resurrection from the dead.

Jesus Christ, our Lord, through him, we've received grace and apostleship to call all the Gentiles to the obedience that comes from faith for his name's sake.

You see the reason that Paul does what he does? It really comes down to the gospel message that he's carrying and the message that we as a church carry today.

Paul is dead, all right? We are now carrying that message that he carried. It's like an Olympic torch. You know, the Olympic torch is supposed to pass from person to person and never go out. At least that's the theory.

[ 3 : 39 ] Well, that's certainly what's supposed to happen with the gospel. Paul carried that and now we're carrying the very thing that he carried those thousands of years ago. And it's here that Paul writes why he keeps going with it and why we need to keep going with it today.

And the first reason is because of its authority, because of the authority of this gospel message. That's the first lesson we learn about the gospel from this passage.

Notice that when Paul describes his mission to carry this torch, to carry this gospel message, he writes it as if he doesn't really have a choice in the matter.

Notice the words he uses. He's called to be an apostle. He's set apart for the gospel. Later on in verse 14 he writes, I am obligated, literally I am indebted to preach the gospel.

You see in Paul's mind, preaching the gospel wasn't something he thought he might like to do. It wasn't a career option. It wasn't something that he got into because it interested him. No, he was doing what he was doing because he had no choice in his mind.

[ 4 : 43 ] Now why? Why did Paul feel like he was so compelled, so obligated to preach the gospel? Why did he have no choice in the matter? Well, because of what the gospel message actually is, what it says.

And that's what he goes on to describe from verse 1. Look at verse 1. He says it is the gospel of God. It's not the gospel of people. It's the gospel of God. Literally, it's a message from God to us, his creatures.

It's a transmission from heaven to earth. And in verse 3 he says it's a message about his son who came into this world. The son of the creator of the universe.

The creator himself as God the son coming as a person into this world. And if that's the case, if that is true, which it was proven to be through his resurrection from the dead, then you can understand why Paul was so eager to make it known to people.

If that is true, then everybody needs to hear it. And Paul was compelled. The message was so important that he couldn't not tell people.

[ 5 : 52 ] It was because of the gravity of the message that he was compelled. It's like a court summons. I don't know if anybody here has ever received a court summons. Don't put up your hand if you have.

It's probably best you keep it to yourself. But a court summons, if you get a summons to go to court, it doesn't just come in the post. It gets delivered, hand delivered by a sheriff of the court.

And that's because it's an important message. It's that important that you receive it. And the sheriff's job is to make sure it's delivered. And that's the kind of compulsion Paul's feeling about the gospel message to deliver it to people.

It's a message that has such serious implications that he can't but do everything he can to make sure it gets through to people. Even if people don't want to hear it, most people don't want to receive a court summons.

And yet they have to listen to it. They have to obey it. It's the same with the gospel. And just like a court summons, you know, it doesn't only have authority over Paul as the messenger.

[ 6 : 52 ] It also has authority over us, the recipients, when we hear it or before we even hear it. You know, if you get a court summons, it's got authority over you. You can't just throw it in the bin like you would an advert from checkers.

A court summons, you have to listen to it. You have to pay attention to it because of where it's from. And the gospel is the same. The gospel message that we're told, we need to take notice of it because it's a message from God to us.

To all the people he's made. All the people. Not just some of the people. Not just those who have Christian inclinations or religious type of people. No. Look at verse 5. Through him, we received grace and apostleship to call all the Gentiles.

All the Gentiles. The Gentiles, the word literally means nations. And he says, we must tell all the nations. All the nations have to hear this news.

And take it seriously. Not just some. You know, not just the European nations. Christianity is not just a white man's religion. Like often it's been publicized in history.

[ 7 : 58 ] In fact, before, if we read Acts. Before the gospel even reached Europe, it went to Africa. Africa was the first place that was evangelized with the gospel. Before Europe.

Because you see, the gospel is for all people. It's for all the world. Not just some cultures. Not just some people. It's not culturally bound. But more than that. It's not that all people just need to hear it. All people must obey it. Look at verse 5 again. Through him, we received grace and apostleship to call all the Gentiles to the obedience that comes from faith.

For his name's sake. You see, what he means here with that phrase, the obedience of faith. Or the obedience that comes from faith. What he means is that when you believe the gospel, you must obey it as well.

It's not a message that you can just believe and go, okay, well that's interesting. And then carry on living the way you're living. The nature of the gospel is so important that it demands that you do something about it.

[ 9 : 01 ] You can't ignore it. You need to act in response to the gospel message. If you don't, then you haven't heard it properly. I was once preparing to sail a race in False Bay on a yacht.

And the fleet was all getting ready. And then we had already mapped out our course and where the race was going to be. And then we got a message from the South African Navy telling us that that day they were going to be doing gunnery practice in False Bay from their shore battery in Simonstown.

And the area that they were going to be shooting in was exact coordinates of where we wanted to race. Now, that's not a message that we could just go, oh that's interesting.

And then carry on doing what we were planning to do and go race where we were planning to race. It would have been an interesting race. Added another few elements of excitement into it. But, you see, it was a message that forced us to change our plans.

It forced us to go somewhere else. It forced us to stop doing what we were planning to do and do something else. And that's what the gospel does, you see. That's what Paul means by the obedience that comes from faith.

[ 10 : 07 ] It means a changing of your plans in life based on the truth that God has sent us. It means not going the direction that you were going to go, living for yourself.

It means changing and living in response to the gospel. The right response to the gospel is no less than a complete change of life. That's what the word repentance means, a complete turnaround.

And if you've heard the gospel but haven't responded, then you haven't really heard it.

You see, the gospel is not an optional extra in life. It's not something we can listen to and then put on the shelf. Or choose to listen to when we want to, when it suits us.

It's not some kind of add-on to improve our lives. Like it's so often presented. You know, you so often see the gospel is presented like a product that's going to improve your life. You know, why don't you give the gospel a try?

See if it makes your life better. No. Paul doesn't present it like that here in the Romans. He doesn't present it like some product you can choose. He presents it as a statement of truth from our God that you can't ignore.

[ 11 : 13 ] It's a message that has authority. The gospel message has authority. That's why people don't like it. That's why people try to keep Christians quiet. That's why people kill Christians and persecute Christians.

Because the message they carry has authority. It has authority over you. Whether you like it or not. Authority to take notice of it, to listen to it, and to obey it.

And it has authority over the people you know. The people you work with. Your family members. Even if they have no interest in it, it still has authority over them because it's from the God who made them and owns them, whether they realize it or not.

And so we can't keep quiet about it. Like Paul, we're compelled, we're indebted to those people to tell them the truth that God has revealed in his Son. As a church, we need to make it known.

And that's the first reason we do what we do. Because the gospel has authority. Not only over you, but over the people around us. The people you work with. Secondly, though, not just the authority of the gospel, but the power of the gospel.

[ 12 : 21 ] Look with me at verse 16. For I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God. Think about that.

That's an incredible phrase. The gospel is the power of God. Now, what do you think about when you think about God's power? What do you picture typically? A thunderstorm.

A storm. You know, a giant mountain. A waterfall. Thunder. All the incredible miracles in the Bible that we see performed. The parting of a sea.

The raising of the dead. The calming of a storm at sea. You know, these are all demonstrations of God's power. But Paul is saying here that more powerful than any of these is the gospel message. The gospel message is more powerful than a miracle or a storm or anything like that. Any other demonstration of God's power.

[13:18] Why? Because the gospel message changes the course of people's lives like nothing else can. The gospel message changes people's hearts like nothing else can.

Not even miracles. I mean, you'd think a miracle is more convincing to people than a message. But in the Bible, when miracles happen, they only ever happen to validate a messenger of a message from God.

It was the message that changed people. Not the miracle. It's the message that has the power to change people when it's a message from God. And that's how God has always exercised his power in people's lives and on earth.

Not through armies or, you know, fire from heaven. Often he's had to make a point using things like that. But primarily, God exercises his power in this world through his words.

In Genesis, in the chapter before, the one that Adrian read for us earlier, Genesis chapter 1, right at the beginning of the Bible, he created the world, the universe. God created with a word.

[14:25] He spoke and it came into being. In the gospels, Jesus healed people by speaking words. All he did. And that's a profound thing about the miracles Jesus performed.

He just said something. He just says, Talita kum, little girl, get up. Or he just says, be healed. Or he just says to the waves, be still.

Just his words have immense power. And it's all to show us that the words that God speaks have the most powerful effect in our world. And on individual lives.

And so you see, we shouldn't just pay attention to the gospel and God's words because of their authority over us. But also because of their power. How they work in us. How they work in people. How they work in our communities.

You know, what I hold in my hand right now is more powerful than a nuclear bomb. Seriously. Because this is the means by which God works in people's lives and in communities.

[15:24] In our communities of Southfield and Plumstead. In your lives. In my life. God works. His power works through this. That's how he's decided to work in this world. And it's the means by which he will work in your life.

You know, do you want to experience God's power in your life? Are you desperate to experience God's power in your life? Really, are you? Well, then it won't be through some amazing experience. Or seeing a vision. Or an angel visiting you. Or some deep meditation. Or a miracle. No. It'll happen when you open the Bible. And when you engage with God's words and obey them.

Then you will see God's power working in your life like never before. And that's why we need to constantly encourage each other with God's words. In the Bible. As Christians.

Notice what Paul says in verse 11. And verse 12. I long to see you so that I may impart to you some spiritual gift to make you strong. What do you think he was talking about? Some charismatic gift?

[16:21] Some amazing miraculous power? No. He was talking about giving them God's word. That's the gift he was talking about. Verse 12. That is that you and I may be mutually encouraged by each other's faith.

And then on to verse 15. That is why I am so eager to preach the gospel also to you who are in Rome. You see, Paul was so eager to bring God's words to the Romans.

Because he knew that that's the way God's power would work in their lives. Like nothing else. And specifically as they were reminded of the gospel. As they were reminded of Jesus and who he was and what he did.

And all that that means for them. And also notice that this is a very interesting point. In verse 12. That Paul says he will be strengthened and encouraged by them.

It's a strange thing for an apostle to say. You would think that he's going to give them. But actually he's going to get from them too. Encouragement. You see, we strengthen and encourage each other.

[17:19] How? As we remind each other of God's words. Do you want to strengthen? Do you want to encourage your Christian husband or wife or friend or sister or brother? Well, the best way to do that is to open the Bible and read it with them.

To meet up for coffee and open the Bible. Read it together. Because it's God's words that strengthen and encourage. And we can encourage each other and strengthen each other. When we remind each other of God's words.

When we remind each other of the gospel and all that it means for us. I must admit, being a pastor to you lot is hard work.

And at the beginning of this year, the very first week after Christmas and all of that, I was quite tired. Now, I say it's hard work, but it's delightful work as well.

I love you all. And I wouldn't want to do anything else in the whole world. But I was tired at the beginning of this year. I was a bit exhausted. I was feeling a bit down in the first week. And the one thing that strengthened me in that week was when I met with another Christian.

[18:22] And we spoke about God together. And we shared the gospel to each other. We reminded each other of what God had done in our lives. And that gave me a whole new lease on life.

It boosted me. It was the thing that got me through that week. And we need to be doing that with each other. We need to be sharing God's words with each other as we open the Bible together, as we share the powerful word of God with each other.

And that is why it is so vital, let me say, it is so vital to be part of a Bible study that Adrian was talking about earlier. It's not because we at St. Mark's want you to go.

It's because you need to go, whether you know it or not. Because it's as you chew over God's word with other people that he will work in your life. As you apply it. You know, we only have a certain amount of time to look at the word together on Sunday mornings.

It's in our midweek Bible studies that we really get to dig into it and apply it to each other's lives and hold each other accountable. And so I want you to take that opportunity.

[19:24] Even if you're busy, everyone's busy. But when you're busy, you prioritize things based on how important they are to you. You give time to what's important. And there's nothing more important than God's word for you.

And so make time to join a Bible study. But I want to also give you another opportunity. Maybe you're not ready for a small Bible study group yet. And so here's another opportunity to chew over God's word.

Especially the gospel message that's the center of God's word. And to hear it from the lips of Jesus himself. I'm going to be running a four-part course called Know the Truth on Sunday evenings.

We meet you on Sunday mornings. We currently do nothing in the evenings. So it's a great opportunity to get together and just walk with Jesus. To hear the words of Jesus. And go over the fundamentals of what the gospel is.

And also it will give you an opportunity to ask whatever questions you have. Maybe you've really been battling with questions. And you've never felt that you had the liberty to ask them. Will I invite the hardest questions about the gospel?

[20:28] And I want you to bring your questions. And we can ask them and discuss them and see what Jesus has to say. And it's a course. This course is for people who know absolutely nothing about the Bible.

Who wouldn't call themselves Christians but want to just find out a little bit more. And it's for people who have been Christians for years and want to get refreshed. Get a reminder of what the gospel is all about.

And experience the gospel firsthand again. And so I encourage you to come to this course. There will be a sign-up sheet in the foyer on your way out and in the hall. You see you can't escape without having a sign-up sheet.

Unless you go through the windows. But I discourage that. And so please do. As you pass it. If this is something that you will benefit from. And I know you will. Then sign up. And give your contact details.

And we'll get in touch with you. As to exactly when we're going to run it in the details. But maybe. Maybe you're saying. Nah. No. I'm not that interested in the gospel. You know.

[ 21 : 24 ] Why should I be? I'm quite happy as I am. Well. Why should you be interested in the gospel? Because the third thing we learn about the gospel here is its necessity.

Its necessity. How necessary the gospel is for you. Now look at verse 16 and 17 again. For I am not ashamed of the gospel.

Because it is the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes. First to the Jew and then to the Gentile. For in the gospel the righteousness of God is revealed.

A righteousness that is by faith. Okay. So why is God's word. Especially in the gospel message. Why is that so powerful? Because it brings salvation to everyone who believes.

Salvation. Now what is salvation? You see salvation is often a word we use. And we hear. But often we don't quite understand what it means. It's one of those terms you talk a lot about.

[ 22 : 26 ] But don't necessarily grasp. Well salvation in the Bible. It's a multifaceted idea. But it means basically God restoring broken people into the people that he intended them to be.

That is salvation. In a nutshell. You know earlier we read from Genesis. And we were reminded of what the world was before sin entered. You know people were in right relationship with God.

In right relationship with each other. And there was no shame. There was no sin. There was no brokenness. There was no awkwardness. That's what we were made for. A world where we can enjoy God and his creation. And enjoy each other fully.

But you see when sin came into our world. Those relationships were torn apart. They were broken. And in consequence we became broken. You and I.

You know. When we sin. We're not being who God made us to be. And we're breaking ourselves more and more. When we sin. Our own sins and the sins of others.

[ 23 : 29 ] Committed against us. Have broken us. Beyond our ability to repair ourselves. It's kind of like a piece of paper. Like this.

All right. There's what the piece of paper is supposed to be. If I rip it in half. Then it's not supposed to be like that. And I can't put it back together again. You see.

I can't fix this. It's broken beyond repair. And that's what sin has done to each one of us. It's broken us beyond repair.

And no amount of religion can fix that. No amount of doing the right things can fix that. You know what religion is like? Religion is this. Religion is sticky tape.

Religion is taking pieces of sticky tape and trying to make us who we were supposed to be again. You know. Trying to put good deeds on. Trying to make ourselves look decent.

[ 24 : 26 ] So then we look like that. And we say. Okay. We're who we're meant to be. But we're not. We're still broken. We might have decent looking lives. And look a little bit more like we're supposed to be.

But we're still inherently broken. You see. That's what sin does to us. And there's nothing we can do to fix ourselves. We're not who we're meant to be. And that is why the gospel message is so necessary for every single person.

Because the gospel is the power of God for salvation. In other words. The gospel is the one thing that can restore people to who they were meant to be. Why?

Because of verse 17. Paul explains. Because in the gospel. The righteousness of God is revealed. A righteousness that is by faith. You see. That means that in the gospel.

God shows us what he has done. A righteousness of God. Not a righteousness of man. He shows us what he has done. To make people righteous. To fix us. Instead of what we must do to fix ourselves.

[ 25 : 26 ] You see the difference? So. In the gospel. As opposed to other religions. God doesn't give us more sticky tape. To try to fix ourselves.

You know what God does in the gospel? He holds out a whole new page. He holds out a whole new page for us to take. You know religion offers people this.

Here. The gospel offers people this. Which are you going to take? Because the gospel is the only way that people can really be saved.

Who they were meant to be. Washed clean. Pure. Right. In God's eyes again. And it's over the next few weeks. That we're going to really dig into that gospel message.

And what it does for us. And how. God gives us a new life. And how you. Can live that new life. And so come back. Join us.

[ 26 : 20 ] As we discover. God's gospel. God's powerful saving message. That can make you. Into the person. That he made you to be. So come back. But in the meantime. Sign up.

For know the truth. Course. To discover or rediscover. The gospel for yourself. Why do we do what we do as a church? Why do we keep doing it?

Why do we keep declaring the gospel message? Even when people don't want to hear it? Well because. The gospel has authority over those people. Whether they know it or not. Because the gospel is God's power. To change those people.

And because the gospel is the only way. That those people. And us. Can truly. Truly be saved. It's prayer. That God would help us. To declare it. Heavenly Father.

We are reminded this morning. Of Paul's passion. To preach the gospel. His indebtedness to people. To preach the gospel. And oh Lord. We pray that you would give us. The same desire.

[ 27 : 17 ] That you would give us. The same seriousness. About the gospel message. That we would no longer treat it. As just. Something that we think about. On Sundays. But it would be. What sets the tone. Of our entire lives.

What sets the course. Of our lives. Lord help us. To take the gospel message. Seriously. Help us. To listen to Jesus. And obey him. To follow him.

And Lord help us. Not to keep quiet. We know how desperately. The world needs the gospel. It is the only thing. That will save people. And so we pray. That you would use us. At St. Mark's. Powerfully.

To declare the gospel. Clearly. And effectively. To the communities. Around us. So that you would call people. To yourself. That you would save people. And that you would restore people. To who you made them to be.

We pray this in Jesus name. Amen. Amen.