

EXODUS 6:2-12
GOD'S MISSION STATEMENT

“Building Christ’s Church in the Community”. That’s our Church Mission Statement. You may or may not know that. Whether or not you know it, is a test of how well (or otherwise) we have communicated that to you. You will see it pinned onto notice boards, or on the inside of doors as you leave the building; you will see it printed each week on the order of service; it is printed in *Church News*; it is at the very top of the front page of our website. Our Mission statement is meant to tell you what Juniper Green Church is about, that we are concerned to build the Church that belongs to Jesus Christ and to do so within the community around us; it is important for us to make the Church stronger and to do that by all sorts of ways, not the least of which is by strengthening links with the communities around us. That should tell you something of the culture of our Church, the things that we count as important and the way we go about things; it may need explaining, but at least it gives some kind of idea of what makes Juniper Green Church tick.

Today we begin a series of sermons on the theme of ‘mission.’ We set the scene for it last week, but today we begin to consider what the word ‘mission’ means for us as a Church. As I explained last week, some of the thinking behind this comes from my Study Leave in August, when I took 2 weeks to consider some of the latest writings on mission and pulled these together and the paper that I wrote is on the website and there are some paper copies in the vestibule; feel free to take it away and read it and come and tell me if you don’t understand bits of it. To understand mission is hugely important for the Church in the early 21st century: what is the Church for? What is our purpose? Why are we here? Does the Church have a role in society, or the world, or the community any more or are we on the way out, an irrelevance from a bygone age? It is hugely important to think about how we relate to the world and the community around us, otherwise we will simply stagnate and die. Over the next few weeks, I hope we will gain some kind of insight into what the Bible teaches us about mission, about the mission that God does, about the mission on which he sent Jesus and about the mission to which He has called His Church, us. Here goes!

Last week, we set the scene for this new series. The first thing we said is “Mission is something God does!” This was my first discovery on Study Leave: mission is something God does; mission belongs to God. “Mission was not made for the Church; the Church was made for mission – God’s Mission” (Wright p.62) We can make plans and mission strategies and statements, but the basic, fundamental truth we need to understand is this: mission belongs to God. We have a part to play in all of this and each week as we go along, we’ll consider what our part is, but we start here: mission is something God does. Why do people come through the front door of our Church for first time? Basically, because the Spirit of God works in our hearts and minds to persuade us that it will be a good idea. It might be in response to an invitation, or a Christmas card, or an Easter leaflet, or a conversation with one of you, or none of these; but basically, the Spirit of God is at work in our hearts and minds and persuades us that coming to Church and being part of a Christian community, a believing people, people just like us – that this is a good thing, so we choose to do it. Unless the Spirit is at work, unless God is engaged in His mission, none of our plans and programmes are worth a jot! Pray that God will be at work!

Let’s look at an example of God’s mission in Exodus 6. Chris Wright calls this passage “God’s mission statement” for the whole story of Exodus. Here’s a bit of background: Israel is God’s people; they are in a bit of bother’. They went to live in Egypt in the days of Joseph, they needed food and there was food in Egypt and Joseph was famous and took his family to live with him and provide for them in

Egypt. But 400 yrs later, Pharaoh didn't know about Joseph and all he saw was a troublesome people, these Hebrews, and he was scared that they would rebel against him, an enemy inside the camp, so he made them into his slaves and made them work on some of his great building projects, eg Pyramids. The slave drivers kept them going and they were miserable in slavery; they prayed that God would set them free. Moses was a Hebrew, but he had grown up in Pharaoh's palace; God sent Moses to be leader and to set them free. All was not going well for Moses or for Israel. People didn't believe he was the answer to their prayers. He complains. This is God's answer.

"I am..." (6:6-8) If this were a picture, who is the centre and focus? God! There are two declarations and seven promises. Twice God says to Moses: *"I am the Lord."* (6:6) The exodus that will happen is a defining moment in Israel's history; they looked back on it later as the moment that defined their relationship with God and here at the very start they are told who it is they are dealing with: 'the Lord', the living God, the God who made the world and who loved them enough to make them His people, God who is King. All of this is included when God said *"I am the Lord!"* It is not such a bad idea to be clear about this because today we live in a world where there seem to be lots of ideas of who or what God is and even a range of different so-called 'gods' themselves. We deal with and stand for and bear witness to, the living God, God who made the world, the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. It is the same God who has been at work in the world and who is at work still in us and through us. Twice He says *"I am the Lord."* God who is about to go to work.

Seven times in these three verses, God says 'I will'; here is God's mission statement. Here He sets out what He is about to do for His people. In fact, there are 3 threads to this mission statement: God will set them free; God will be their God; God will give them a promised land. All of these promises came true as story unfolds. This is the mission of God for his people.

1. God will set His people free: *"I will..." (6:6)* Israel longed to be free; they were slaves to Pharaoh and the language is all about setting people free, that's what 'redeem' means. He will answer His people's prayers and that He will act on their behalf to set them free. To do that, He has sent Moses to be their leader; they don't quite understand that yet, and neither really does Moses himself, but that will happen and by chapters 12-14, the people are free and chapter 15 is a great song of victory where they rejoice that there is no-one like their God because He has done great things for them, just as He promised.

2. God will be their God: *"I will..." (6:7)* There will be a mutual relationship of love between God and His people. He will love them and they will love Him back, but the initiative comes from God. If you are married, I don't know how you met your spouse; there will be as many answers as there are couples in building, I suspect. No matter how or where you met, I can pretty well guarantee that someone made the first move; one invited the other out on a date; things moved on from there. In the relationship of love between God and His people, whether His Old Testament people Israel, or His New Testament people the Church – in that relationship of love, God always makes the first move. He has already made the first move; He will be our God and we will be His people.

3. God will give Israel a promised land: *"I will..." (6:8)* Land is precious; the promised land has become something iconic in Israel; this is why modern Israel is so determined not to give up any land to the Palestinians, because they believe that the land is God-given; that doesn't excuse violence and bloodshed, however! For the Old Testament people, this is what God promised and this is what God did; they did inhabit promised land; it was theirs.

This is all about what God will do for His people; God is the active player on a mission on behalf of His beleaguered people. This is God's mission statement; God is going to do these things and God achieved all that He set out to do.

'All' Israel had to do was 'know the Lord.' "*Then you...*" (6:7b) That is all that Israel will do, come to know the Lord. The sad thing is that when Moses went to tell them all this, they refused to listen to him, although later they came to see that Moses was right; they came to know God as a great, loving, strong, faithful God. All the way through the next few chapters of Exodus, there is a chorus that is repeated in Moses' meetings with Pharaoh: the various miracles and plagues were given "*So that you may know that there is no-one like the Lord our God.*" (8:10) Israel did nothing else; all they did in this story is come to know God and know that He is Lord. God did the rest.

The same is true in the gospel. We are Christians because of something God has done. When we read about Jesus and when Bible tells us that Jesus is our Saviour, it is all about God doing something for us, for a beleaguered people in different sense. It tells us that we have problems and issues, we have a broken relationship with God, we have faults and failings, and mistakes, sin, and only God can fix these problems and issues for us. Indeed, God has fixed these problems and issues when He sent Jesus into the world and when Jesus lived, died and was raised, He saved us. The gospel is about God doing something for us; God is the active player on the field on our behalf. The Christian gospel is not a self-help magazine in which there are handy tips on how to DIY salvation; the gospel tells us of something that God has done for us in Jesus Christ. What is left for us is to come to know God, to know Jesus, to know that God has loved us and has done great things for us, to know that Jesus has lived, and loved, died and is raised for us; to know God's forgiveness for our sin and waywardness; to know His endless love. This is something God has done, His rescue mission for the world.

"*You will be my witnesses*" (Acts 1:8) Imagine an accident outside Church as you leave; you are interviewed afterwards by the police; what do you tell them? You tell them what you know, what you have seen! The Police don't expect you to tell them the driver's date of birth or the addresses of all the other people involved; indeed, they would be suspicious if you did know all of these details. "Just tell us what you know!" God did great things for Israel; His mission for His people; God has done even greater things for us in Jesus Christ, His on-going mission in our world. He did these things so that people know Him and know what He has done. We are His witnesses. We "are not really called to accomplish anything, only to point to what God has done and is doing." (David Bosch) Mission is something God does: we have seen that in Exodus; we have seen that in Jesus; it is for us to know the Lord and to believe in Him; then we are witnesses to what God has done so that others know Him and believe.