

## THE CORE BUSINESS OF JESUS CHRIST AND HIS CHURCH

When someone shows up at your door, the first question that comes into your mind is, 'What does he/she want?' Why has he/she come? The Bible says that 'the word became flesh and showed up among us' (John 1:12). So the question is why did he come. There are a number of places in the gospels where Jesus explicitly says why he came.

### **Luke 19:1-10**

<sup>1</sup> He entered Jericho and was passing through.

<sup>2</sup> And behold, there was a man named Zacchaeus. He was a chief tax collector and was rich.

<sup>3</sup> And he was seeking to see who Jesus was, but on account of the crowd he could not, because he was small in stature.

<sup>4</sup> So he ran on ahead and climbed up into a sycamore tree to see him, for he was about to pass that way.

<sup>5</sup> And when Jesus came to the place, he looked up and said to him, "Zacchaeus, hurry and come down, for I must stay at your house today."

<sup>6</sup> So he hurried and came down and received him joyfully.

<sup>7</sup> And when they saw it, they all grumbled, "He has gone in to be the guest of a man who is a sinner."

<sup>8</sup> And Zacchaeus stood and said to the Lord, "Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor. And if I have defrauded anyone of anything, I restore it fourfold."

<sup>9</sup> And Jesus said to him, "**Today salvation has come to this house**, since he also is a son of Abraham.

<sup>10</sup> **For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost.**"

OK, file that for a moment: 'The Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost'.

### **Luke 5:27-32**

<sup>27</sup> After this he went out and saw a tax collector named Levi, sitting at the tax booth. And he said to him, "Follow me." <sup>28</sup> And leaving everything, he rose and followed him.

<sup>29</sup> And Levi made him a great feast in his house, and there was a large company of tax collectors and others reclining at table with them.

<sup>30</sup> And the Pharisees and their scribes grumbled at his disciples, saying, "Why do you eat and drink with tax collectors and sinners?"

<sup>31</sup> And Jesus answered them, "**Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick.** <sup>32</sup> **I have not come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance.**"

### **Mark 10:43-45**

<sup>43</sup> But it shall not be so among you. But whoever would be great among you must be your servant,

<sup>44</sup> and whoever would be first among you must be slave of all.

<sup>45</sup> For even **the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.**"

### **1 Timothy 1:15-17**

<sup>15</sup> The saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance, that **Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners**, of whom I am the foremost.

<sup>16</sup> But I received mercy for this reason, that in me, as the foremost, Jesus Christ might display his perfect patience as an example to those who were to believe in him for

eternal life.

<sup>17</sup> To the King of the ages, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory forever and ever. Amen.

### **John 3:16-17**

<sup>16</sup> "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.

<sup>17</sup> For **God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.**

One of Jesus' parables gives us a perfect picture of why Jesus came and what his core business was and still is:

### **Luke 15:1-10**

<sup>1</sup> Now the tax collectors and sinners were all drawing near to hear him.

<sup>2</sup> And the Pharisees and the scribes grumbled, saying, "This man receives sinners and eats with them."

<sup>3</sup> So he told them this parable:

<sup>4</sup> "What man of you, having a hundred sheep, if he has lost one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the open country, and go after the one that is lost, until he finds it?"

<sup>5</sup> And when he has found it, he lays it on his shoulders, rejoicing. <sup>6</sup> And when he comes home, he calls together his friends and his neighbors, saying to them, 'Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep that was lost.'

<sup>7</sup> Just so, I tell you, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance.

This story of Jesus inspired Elizabeth Clephane to write the following hymn.

There were ninety and nine that safely lay

In the shelter of the fold.

But one was out on the hills away,

Far off from the gates of gold.

Away on the mountains wild and bare.

Away from the tender Shepherd's care.

Away from the tender Shepherd's care.

"Lord, Thou hast here Thy ninety and nine;

Are they not enough for Thee?"

But the Shepherd made answer: "This of Mine

Has wandered away from Me;

And although the road be rough and steep,

I go to the desert to find My sheep,

I go to the desert to find My sheep."

But none of the ransomed ever knew

How deep were the waters crossed;

Nor how dark was the night the Lord passed through

Ere He found His sheep that was lost.

Out in the desert He heard its cry,

Sick and helpless and ready to die;  
Sick and helpless and ready to die.

“Lord, whence are those blood drops all the way  
That mark out the mountain’s track?”

“They were shed for one who had gone astray  
Ere the Shepherd could bring him back.”

“Lord, whence are Thy hands so rent and torn?”

“They are pierced tonight by many a thorn;  
They are pierced tonight by many a thorn.”

And all through the mountains, thunder riven  
And up from the rocky steep,

There arose a cry to the gate of Heaven,

“Rejoice! I have found My sheep!”

And the angels echoed around the throne,

“Rejoice, for the Lord brings back His own!

Rejoice, for the Lord brings back His own!”

If you wish to know and understand a person, like Jesus for example, you need to know and understand what motivates them. What is on their heart, what preoccupies their mind and their attention. Sometimes we say of someone, ‘Oh, she has got a bee in her bonnet’ about something. Jesus told a story about a woman who had a bee in her bonnet. She had lost something that was very precious to her.

#### **Luke 15:8-10**

<sup>8</sup> “Or what woman, having ten silver coins, if she loses one coin, does not light a lamp and sweep the house and seek diligently until she finds it?

<sup>9</sup> And when she has found it, she calls together her friends and neighbors, saying, ‘Rejoice with me, for I have found the coin that I had lost.’

<sup>10</sup> Just so, I tell you, there is joy before the angels of God over one sinner who repents.”

I don’t think he will mind me saying, but, just like this woman, Jesus has a bee in his bonnet. Something precious that belongs to him; something like the woman’s lost coin; something that he has paid a great price to redeem; that something is lost. And Jesus is preoccupied with searching for it and finding it. Furthermore, his church is an instrument in the Lord’s hand which he continually wishes to use to carry out his search for lost sheep.

Recently, God gave me a picture of the church as a bow with which our Lord fires his arrows of the gospel, and the string of the bow is us believers. Without us the bow cannot fire Jesus’ gospel arrows. But the string has to take the tension of firing the arrow, and many Christians do not wish to be put in that situation. And so sometimes there is a bow, i.e. a congregation, that has no string. When Jesus picks up that bow to use it, and he sees that it has no string, he quickly lays it down and takes up another bow. His absolute preoccupation is with reaching the lost with the gospel, so when time passes, and that bow still has no string, the Master Archer picks it up and throws it in the bin. Remember, in the book of revelation, what he said to the church in Ephesus?

## **Revelation 2:5**

<sup>5</sup> Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent, and do the works you did at first. If not, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place, unless you repent.

One of the things we do at first, that is when we became a Christian, is to tell others about Jesus. 'Come and see a man who told me all I ever did; Could this be the Christ?'

Today, in the western world, many Christian churches are having their lampstand removed. However, in contrast to this very sad situation, when a church is engaged in seeking and saving the lost, it is like a bow in the Master-Archer's hand, always in use, and feeling the strong and purposeful grip of the Lord. Only when a church is engaged in seeking and saving the lost can it be truly alive and invigorated by the Spirit of God.

Have you ever put your ear on someone's chest and heard the boomp, boomp, boomp of their heart beating? When a church is one with the Good Shepherd in his gospel mission, you can put your ear to that body of believers and hear the Lord's heart beating within that body: Boomp, Boomp, Boomp!. And because 'there is more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance' (Luke 15:7), God will expend surprising miracle power when his people are working with Jesus in his passionate labour of saving love.

As it happens, I brought some gospel arrows with me today. A leaflet entitled *Four important questions, two different answers*. It is a simple gospel leaflet. The main question with this arrow is not whether it is a good gospel arrow, but whether it gets fired (i.e. given to someone) or left in the quiver. To give it to someone requires that 'we are not ashamed of the gospel', as 'the power of God for salvation' (Romans 1:16).

Let us talk now to the Good Shepherd:

Lord Jesus Christ, thank you for the wonderful revelation of yourself as the Good Shepherd; of you away on the mountains wild and bare, seeking and saving the lost in an unbelieving world. And thank you for shedding your own precious blood out on that mountain wild and bare to redeem the lost. Thank you for your absolute joy when you find one sheep that is lost, and can bring it home in repentance and faith.

God forbid, Lord, that I should be ashamed of you or your gospel. Rather, let me be truly the strong string in your bow, the church. Please use me to fire your gospel arrow to places and people where it has not gone before. Lord, money can't buy happiness, but working with you is the supreme fulfilment as we share your joy, the joy of the Good Shepherd bringing home your lost sheep. Lord Jesus, may that ever be my joy in this life. Amen.