

Global Ministry Conference 2026

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Reconciling the World – The Call of Jesus in Mark's Gospel

It's lovely to be here tonight. Brothers, sisters, could we please turn to Acts 17? Can we make sure we're in pairs? So we've got someone to sit next to just chat with them. Training is not lecturing, so we're training together. We're going to be doing that... It's a joy to be here.

Can you remember last night, brothers and sisters, we said, let's listen for a Christian and a non-Christian. So as you listen, you're listening as a river. It's going to flow through you, not as a reservoir where it's just going into you. So just turn to the person next to you now and say, This is John, who's the non-Christian I'm listening for. It'd be lovely to be able to open Mark's gospel with them. This is the Christian who I could maybe share this passage with that I could do that because we're all meant to be disciple making disciples of Christ. So just do that quickly. Let's get the two names in place, the Christian and non-Christian. Then we'll look at acts seventeen. Over to you. You've got 30s. Just turn across and say, these are the two people I'm listening for, the Christian and the non-Christian. Okay, now acts seventeen. Can we turn to it? And can you turn please to verse 24. Here is Paul in Athens, and I want you with the person next to you. And by the way, of course, I'm going to ask I'm going to ask a pair to give me the answer. So on your toes, please, even if you're at the back, I might sprint up the back and ask you, okay, I want you to tell me who is God in verse twenty four of acts seventeen. Who is God in verse twenty five, and who is God in verse twenty six? Over to you. Read the read the words. And then how is God described in twenty four, twenty five, and twenty six? By the way, I know of no passage that that gives me such optimism and energy as this does. Let's look at it now. End of a long day. Over we go. Let's do some work. Who's got in twenty four? Who is in twenty five? Who is in twenty six? Over to you. How is God described in each verse? Great. Now think of teaching this. Okay, give me some help over here. Who has got in verse twenty four? He is the creator, the God who made the world and everything in it. There's some great views. I was going for a little walk this afternoon. It's an amazing little. It's an amazing city, just lovely. And God made it so. The God who made the world and everything in it, being Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in temples made by hands, says Paul, who is God in verse twenty five. How is God described in verse twenty five? He is the giver of life. He is the sustainer. Do we see verse twenty five, brothers and sisters. Nor is he served by human hands as though he needed anything, since he himself gives to all mankind life and breath and everything else. Can you please think of that non-Christian that you just mentioned? So you're thinking of the one you'd like to talk to? Brother. Sister. The only reason they woke up this morning is because God gave them breath. That is the only reason they're breathing. I think of my friend Andy. I've known him many years. We played rugby together. He's not a Christian. The Lord has lavished gifts upon him. The only reason he woke up today is because God gave him breath in his mercy. And year after year, he shakes his fist at God and God gives him another day. If I was God, I wouldn't have done it. He's so gracious. Who is God? Next verse in verse twenty six. Who is God in verse twenty six? He is the sovereign. He made from one man

every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined the allotted periods and boundaries of their dwelling places. So God, with the non-Christian friend you've got and with your neighbors he decides how long they live and where they live. So everyone you know in your life has been placed there by God. Of course they make their decisions. But you can't stop God being God. That's what we learn. And we've got to think biblically of God in Acts chapter four. You know, uh, he decided, uh, we'd let's just have a look at that back to acts twenty four, acts chapter four, because it's so amazing on the sovereignty of God. Just flip back to acts four. Let's just see that just to see the sovereignty of God. Because in our evangelism, God's sovereignty is absolutely critical. We have to have it in place. Look at verse twenty seven as, uh, Peter, uh, responds here with this prayer after they have been threatened with, with, with silence, verse twenty seven, for truly in this city there were gathered together against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, along with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel. So these were all the enemies of Jesus who conspired together to kill Jesus. You've got Herod. You've got Pontius Pilate. You've got the Roman soldiers. You've got the people of Israel. Now hold on to your seats. Verse twenty eight. To do whatever your hand and your plan had predestined to take place. You've got to be very, very powerful to have your enemies do your bidding while acting against you. And that's how God tells us to think about him. That's how the Bible tells us to think about him. So we have these friends. They constantly act against God, though they're given each breath. But that doesn't stop God being God. And if you don't believe that, look at the cross. It looks as though on Good Friday that God is not in control, but actually. And if you were there, you'd say, well, God's not in control. His son's dying, but he's in total control. You can't stop God being God.

Back to acts seventeen. Let's see it together. Back to acts seventeen. So there is the creator in verse twenty four, the God who made the world there is the sustainer. In verse twenty five, he is the one who gives everyone breath. The only reason I've just breathed because God gave me that breath. He's got his hand on my windpipe. He's given me another breath. That's why we're here. Verse twenty five, verse twenty six. And he decides our times and places. Now here's the question. To what end? This is the creator, the sustainer, the ruler of the universe. What is his plan for the world? We've got the flags. What's God's plan for the world? What is the one who's just given you breath? What does he want for his world? Okay, look at verse twenty seven. Can we see as we look down that they should seek God and perhaps feel their way towards him and find him? Yet he's actually not far from each one of him, or one of us. The creator, sustainer, and ruler of the world has decided he wants people to know his Son. That is his aim for the world. And therefore, with every relationship you have with every neighbor you have, God has put that person next to you.

When I fly back on the plane, as I sit down on the plane and I talk to the person next to me, God has sovereignly decided they're there as I as I try and have a conversation. And here's the word I tell you it fills us with optimism, because God has decided that we've got some neighbors who've just moved in May and now who are a Japanese couple. They think they've come to London in order to work for a Japanese bank. They're in next door to us on Vallis Way, where I live in London. What does verse twenty seven tell me about why they're in London? Why are they in London? According to verse twenty seven, to meet me. That's why they've come to

London. They think they've come to London to work for a bank. They haven't. They've come to meet me. And now let me just say something arrogant. But it's true. Please jot this down. And I am the most important person they know. Because I know Jesus. You are the most important person that the person in your local shop knows, that your neighbor knows the soccer mum that stands next to you at football, whatever it is. Can I tell you? Because you know Jesus on our street Vallis way, um, at Christmas, we were. I was going along with my daughter, my ten year old daughter, Mercy. She'd done a little bag. We were inviting people to church. We put some sweets in the bag. So each one, you know, number ten. Number eleven. We'd done it just before we got to number nine. We were about to knock on the door. She turned around and she said to me, age ten, daddy, this could be the most important moment in their life. Because we're giving them... There was a little tract in there. We're giving them the opportunity to meet Jesus. And that's what life's about. Do you believe that? Do you believe that God has sovereignly placed you where you are with your neighbors, next to you, with your work colleagues? Because his aim is that people meet Jesus? Why? Because he's the creator, sustainer, and ruler.

Once you do believe that, can I tell you it transforms your evangelism. It fills you with optimism and energy because God has placed them there. So now I've just got to see he's the evangelist. I've just got to see what happens. But just jot it down. I am the most important person. They know the dignity of this because I know Jesus and life is about meeting Jesus. That's what the creator, sustainer, and ruler says. Transformational isn't it? Do you know? That really changed my life when I understood those verses and it transformed evangelism? Can you please pass the verse on? It's not just for you.

So as we are looking to tell people the gospel, number one, just four steps. Number one, celebrate people. God has sovereignly put them in your life. Celebrate them. How do we celebrate them? Well, well, you know, we ask them questions. We get to know them. So number one, celebrate them. Gosh, the neighbors, the Japanese neighbors, they've been put there. So the first thing I did, I knocked on the door and I said, you've got to come to a game of rugby. Ever been to rugby? No, come to rugby. It was a filthy day. We got absolutely soaked. Marvellous. But you know, you just share life, celebrate people. The world doesn't do that. The world's on its own.

Secondly, serve them. That's the next thing to do. So point one celebrate people. We've got to do we've got to do that. But point two, serve them random acts of kindness, you know. So keep your conduct. Two Timothy two Peter one Peter two, verse twelve, keep your conduct among the Gentiles honorable, so that they who speak against you as evildoers may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation. You know, one of the reasons for the quiet revival in Britain at the moment. We are seeing loads of people come back to church. It's just extraordinary. I didn't think I'd see it in my lifetime. It's the Christians have been servant hearted. So let's serve and serve and serve a generation that is so self-focused. Let's serve.

Number three. Now this is the third thing. Ask a question. Cross the pain line. Now what we do is we ask lots of questions of people. Let's be doing that. So let's just make sure in our life, just as we share life, we ask questions. So, you know, did you watch the Super Bowl? Where did

you go on holiday? How is your mom's health? What's your biggest stress at work? So we're just level one. We just ask questions because we're sharing life and we're interested. Why? Because they're made in God's image and Christ died for them. Secondly, second thing is we then level two questions is we have the spiritual question we asked them. So for example, Easter is coming up back in my church, uh, in Ealing, where I'm just saying I'm training the church family to go. Do you celebrate Easter? Do you celebrate Easter? Would you come along to church with me? The lovely question would be, do you know, I don't know if you've ever done it, but would you like to have a look at Mark's gospel with me? Now, as we ask that second question, I've got to have my identity in the gospel. You see, here's the issue. So that whether you accept or reject me doesn't make me valuable. What makes me valuable is Christ died for me. So my identity is in the grace of God. I'm secure in that. But then I ask that question. So here's the thing I want you to do now. Turn to the person next to you, the non-Christian, you know. What do you think is the spiritual question you can ask them? Could it be? Would you like to look at Mark's gospel? Could it be? Do you want to come along at Easter? Could it be? What do you think about spiritual things? Just turn across and say, this is their name. And I think this is the question I should be asking them over to you. Let's have a little just have a little. Go at that. Just do that.

What's the question you'd ask the non-Christian who we talked about at the start? What's the question? The spiritual question you'd ask them? Okay, let's be working on that. That's some homework for you, brothers and sisters. So celebrate people, serve them. Ask a question. But number four, exit. So Matthew ten, verse fourteen, where it says, wipe the dust off your feet. In other words, and what we find in the UK is if they go quiet, you go quiet and just go back to celebrating and serving. Oh. England played so badly against Ireland last week. What happened in the rugby. So you're just back to. But some people some people you know Matthew ten fourteen if anyone will not receive you or listen to your words, shake the dust off your feet. Don't literally do it. But actually, if you've asked the question, they don't want to know, leave it. But some people will go, do you know I haven't been to church at Easter? I don't know. Twenty five for twenty five years. When did you go before? Oh, I went with my granny. Where did she live? Oh, we lived in Philadelphia. She took me. Yeah. What was she like? Oh, she was lovely. Why haven't you? You know, what was church like? Actually, I thought the past. Just get them talking. Keep asking questions. Let's chat about that. Now, sometimes they want to leave it. So you go back to. Do you think Mahomes is going to recover in time for next year with the Super Bowl? Whatever it is, I'm trying to be culturally connecting. I don't care about Mahomes. I'm just trying to be nice. You know what I'm saying is exit is important. Matthew ten fourteen. If they go quiet, you go quiet. You don't have to keep chatting. But then, you know, God has sovereignly put you in your life, in them, in your lives. And actually, some people will be interested. And the best thing, if you could say is, do you know, we've got Mark's gospel. Would you like to have a look at it? And what we find in the UK is twenty percent of people in the UK actually, if asked, would they like to look at the Christian faith would say yes at the moment. But that means four out of five are going to reject, but one in five isn't. So you're going to get some rejection. But look you've got the bookmarks here. You can look up the material, the Christian material. You can have a look at it. You can open Mark's Gospel with a friend. Just

let's have a go. And as we're doing that, let's remember, can we stick up the two faced lady? Please stick up the slide. Do you remember that?

Can we turn to Mark chapter eight? Let's turn to Mark eight with our books. Everybody. Mark chapter eight. Do you remember that? there are two ways of seeing. Do you remember this lady last night? The young woman and the old woman? And the next slide, please. The next slide. And there are three words that sum up the whole of Mark's gospel. Everything in Mark's gospel is about the identity of Jesus. Can you see he's not just a man, he's God. About the mission of Jesus. As you look at the cross, can you see it's not a waste. It's a rescue and the call of Jesus. Will you obey or disobey the call? So that's what we're doing. And last night we found that the disciples had layer upon layer of evidence about Jesus. And amazingly, by Mark chapter eight, Peter, when he's asked, who do you say I am? Goes, You're the Christ. You're not just a prophet. Let's have a look down and see that together. Can we see Mark chapter eight? Let's see how that worked. Mark eight together.

Jesus went on with his disciples to the villages around Caesarea Philippi. It was called that, of course, because it was a great center of religion. The Romans renamed it with the signpost behind him. He says, who do you say I am?

With the Hindu temple and the mosque sitting there behind him, he says, who do you say I am? Verse twenty eight, they told him, John the Baptist. Others say Elijah, still others one of the prophets. Now if you look at Jesus and you say, he's like John the Baptist, he's a prophet. He's a great moral teacher. What are you. You're blind. I go home at Christmas. Aunt Agatha is there. How do you spend your time? Oh, I spend some of my time talking about Jesus in Mark's gospel. And she says about Jesus. Oh, he's a great teacher. What do I know about her when she says that she's blind? Well, she is blind, but she's blind. Okay, so. And then what happens with Peter? Do we see, uh, and then Jesus, uh, verse twenty nine. And he asked them, but who do you say I am? Peter answered, you are the Christ. But you see verse thirty, and he strictly charged them to tell no one about him. Why? Because they know who Jesus is. But that is not enough. You've got to know why he came. Next passage. Can we look down? And he began to teach him. The Son of Man must suffer many things, be rejected by the elders, chief priests, and teachers of the law, and be killed. And after three days rise again. And he said this plainly, and Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. Because Peter says, Jesus, you're the greatest miracle worker, the greatest teacher the world has ever seen. Let's go to Jerusalem. You move into number ten, Downing Street. I'll move into number eleven. We'll rule. We're going to rule. But actually, what is the mission of Jesus? Well, he says I've got to die. But turning and seeing his disciples, he rebuked Peter. Get behind me, Satan. You see, he's being blinded by Satan, for you're not sending your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man. So on the Christianity Explored course week six we asked people if you were to die tonight and God said, why should I let you into heaven? What would you reply? And what do people say? You see, what we find is this. They say, I've been good enough. That's why God will accept me. I don't steal, I, uh, I keep the commandments I give to charity. I've not been a murderer or a rapist or a dentist or a traffic warden.

By the way, do you have traffic wardens? What do you call traffic wardens here? Meter maids. What do you call them? What are they called? What are the people that that that that clamp your car when you park it in the wrong place? What are they called? What's the name? A meter maid. Sorry, that joke's gone down terribly. We'll leave it anyway. I don't, I don't lie, I give blood. I had one person once on Christianity say, look, I've given gallons of blood over my time. You know, that's why God will accept me. And so it goes on. I recycle, I recycle, that's why I'll be accepted. Honestly. That's my family. Or they go religious. You know, I go to church. Actually, I don't just go to church. I'm an Episcopalian. I'm a member of the Church of England. You know that, don't you? Why is it the Episcopalians will be first in heaven? Because it says in one Thessalonians four, the dead will rise first. Ha! They're just hopeless. Don't come near us. I've been. I've been baptized. I've been confirmed by a bishop, I pray I read the Bible. You know this will cause God to accept me. Um. It goes. I go to communion in England. People say to me, which is this program on the telly called Songs of Praise. They say literally, I watch songs of praise. That's why God will accept me. And so are you depending on your performance or on Christ's performance, are you saying no? Actually, I'll get in because of what I have done. That's the family I'm in. My grandmother, as she was dying, said to me in nineteen eighty eight. It put me in the ministry. Actually, she said, because I'm a good person, God will accept me. That's what she said. You see, these things will do you no good at all. These, these, you know, there's a gaping wound. And this is this is like sticking plaster. What's the word for a plaster in this country? It's not sticking plaster. What's it, a Band-Aid? This is like a Band-Aid. If you're trusting in this. I mean, if your goodness is good enough, why did Christ have to die? Or are you saying, no, no, Lord Jesus, you have to go to Jerusalem to die. Because otherwise I'll have to pay for my sin myself in hell.

What do you see as you see the cross? And let's have a look and see blindness around the cross. This is so exciting. Can you grab your Mark's Gospels, please? And can you turn to mark chapter fifteen? Let's see this blindness. And as we get to mark chapter fifteen, can you grab, please. Your highlighters. And can you, can you pull off the red. The little red. Um, I'm just trying to think where I put my highlighter. Do you know this is why we lost the Empire? I've lost my highlighter. Where am I? Can I borrow your highlighter, brother? You're my assistant now. It's good to know you. Wonderful. So, can you take your red? Can you take your red highlighter? And just in pairs, we've got Mark chapter fifteen here. Can you just highlight for me please. There we are. We're on page forty eight. Can you highlight verse fifteen. Can you highlight verse twenty four. Can you highlight verse thirty, thirty one and thirty two? Can you highlight verses thirty five and thirty six and verse thirty nine? So if we highlighted those fifteen, twenty four, thirty one, thirty two, thirty five, thirty six and thirty nine. Now turn to the person next to you. And can you see how in all of those verses someone is blind and what is blinding them? So blindness is the great theme. Can you see? And as we come around the cross, amazingly, Mark focuses on what is your reaction to the cross? Have a look at those. Those ones. What's blinding Pilate? What's blinding the soldiers? What about the religious authorities? Over to you in pairs. Just let's dig that out, please. Let's dig it out. How are they blind in each verse? Okay. What's the nature of pilot's blindness? What is it that blinds Pilate wanting to satisfy the crowd? You know, isn't it interesting? In Mark's gospel, there are two powerful men, Herod and Pilate. Both of them try and sit on the fence and other people make the decision about Jesus

for them. Pilate is terrified for and because of ambition. His wife texted him and said, have nothing to do with that man. Do you remember Matthew's gospel? But he know he to satisfy the crowd. He's got to keep his career together. So many people are blinded by ambition, and they won't go near the Christian faith for that reason, wanting to satisfy the crowd. Who are you afraid of that stops you coming to Christ? Now, what about the soldiers? That's amazing. Okay, what? What are the soldiers in verse twenty four? Think the legacy of the crosses. And they crucified him and divided his garments among them, casting lots for them to decide what each would get the soldiers think. The main thing you get out of the cross of Jesus are his clothes. That's blindness, isn't it? They're just getting on with their job. They kill this guy, they get his clothes. Is that all Jesus offers? What do you think he offers when he dies on the cross? Is it just clothes? Well, he does give you clothes. He gives you robes of righteousness. Can you see it? Or are you blind? Pilate is blind. The soldiers are blind. Oh, the best bit of the religious authorities. Can we see verse thirty one. So also the chief priests with the scribes mocked him to one another, saying, he saved others. He can't save himself. Let the Christ, the King of Israel, come down now from the cross that we may see and believe. How does Jesus save others? How does he save others? By not saving himself? That's how he saves you. He saved others. He can't save himself. No. The reason the way he serves saves others is he pays in death and blood for my sin. Can you see it? Can you imagine looking at this with a non-Christian and saying, do you see the blindness? Do you see the blindness? Pilate can't see it. The soldiers can't see it. The religious authorities can't see it. Can you see it? Okay. What about verses thirty six, thirty seven, thirty five, thirty six? And some of the bystanders, hearing it, said, behold, he's calling Elijah. Someone ran, filled a sponge with sour wine, put it on a reed, gave it to him to drink, saying, wait, let us let us see whether Elijah will come to take him down. What's going on there? What's going on there? This is the bystander. Oh, do you know what I love? To go to church in Birmingham every Christmas and Easter. It's great. I went with my granny. I go with the family. But they're not. They're not involved in the death of Jesus. They just go along for the spectacle. Do you know what they put on? A great Christmas festival? I love it. Oh, it's just great. The music's amazing. I go every year. So at the door, they say to Scott, thanks so much. See you next year. But they're not they're not involved in the death of Jesus. They don't say this has happened. So I lay my life down for him. And who's the one who can see? Who can see? Can we see? Verse thirty nine. And the centurion who stood before him saw that in the way that he breathed his last. And he said, truly this man was the Son of God. The Lord calls the man who led his son's murder squad.

Brother. Sister, is there anything you've done that you think is unforgivable? Is it worse than leading the murder squad of Jesus? Because this is the grace of God. The man who just led the murder squad. God says, I'll open your eyes now. He's so kind. So that's the mission of Jesus. And you can color in red so many verses. Can you see what happened? Can you see as he dies? It's for you. Let's just finish now. And can we turn back, please, to see the call of Jesus? Okay, let's have a look back to Mark chapter eight and verse thirty four. And here's the call. We looked at it briefly last night. So back to page twenty six as we close. And calling the crowd to him with his disciples, he said to them, if anyone would come after me, let him deny himself, take up his cross, and follow me. Do you know, I think that this book is the most poignant illustration of the twentieth century. This is Dietrich Bonhoeffer The Cost of Discipleship the

man, of course, who was executed by the Nazis, who led the Confessing Church in Germany during the war and was executed in nineteen forty five, in Flossenbürg. He wrote this book as an exposition of Mark eight, verse thirty four of that verse. And he said, basically he asked this question how is it that Hitler killed six million Jews? How did these atrocities happen? Well, he did it with people who'd been in Lutheran and Catholic Sunday School. He didn't do it in on his own. There were guards in Auschwitz that were taking communion. So how did it happen? And of course, cheap grace. Cheap grace was Luther's answer was, um, sorry, was Bonhoeffer's answer Bonhoeffer's answer? He says cheap grace. He said, if you went to Germany in the nineteen twenties and 30s, if you went to church, then actually if you were going to take verse thirty four, take up your cross and follow me seriously, You became a nun, a priest or a monk. Otherwise, just go along on a Sunday. But we have to take up our cross. It's our whole life. We have to be prepared to go to die. And what does that then mean? To die? In Mark's gospel. Can we turn on to mark chapter nine, please? Mark nine. What does it mean to take up your cross, to follow him and to obey? Well, again, O brothers and sisters, the disciples are like the clowns. They're hopeless. They just don't get what it means to follow the Lord Jesus. Let's have a look as we close verse thirty three. And they came to Capernaum. And when he was in the house, he asked them, what were you discussing on the way? But they kept silent. It's indicative. It goes on. They kept silent, for on the way they had argued with one another about who was the greatest. So they were with the Lord Jesus, the creator of all the world, and they're arguing about who's the greatest. They're jealous of those who went up the mountain to see Jesus in the Transfiguration. You know, why do I take up my cross and follow him? Because in Mark chapter nine at the start, there he is in white in glory, as he'll return to judge the world. And they're wandering along and they're jealous. Why would those three go up the mountain? What about me? So they discussing who was the greatest. And in response, what does Jesus say? And he sat down, called the twelve. And he said to them, if anyone would be first, he must be the last. Now please underline these words, please. And the servant of all. Mark's gospel is about being the servant of all. There is only one epitaph for any Christian, and it is that we are to be servants. And so the disciples, of course, they want to go to Jerusalem, and they want to be in the cabinet. They want to be in Congress. They want to rule. But actually, as we look down, what happens, and he took a child and put him in the midst of them and take him in his arms, he said to them, whoever receives one of these children in my name receives me, and whoever receives me receives not me, but him who sent me. So actually there they're talking about going to the cabinet. And this little boy comes through Peter's house, and Jesus sweeps him up in his arms and he says, no, no, no, you're not to go to the cabinet if you're to follow me. You ought to be the servant of all. That's what it means to follow me. The only you know, we have a view, don't we? You know what? I measure life by success and by achievement and by crowds. Jesus says no, no, no. The person who follows me is to be a servant. That's the great call in Mark's gospel. What does it mean to take up your cross? You're to be a servant of all. Thank you that so many of you are obviously servants, that the Lord God has done a miracle in you, and you are longing to serve. Let's hold our nerves and teach that to non-Christians. It's a life of service. We forget ourselves. We serve others. We serve the Lord. So we never ask, am I happy? Am I fulfilled? We only ask, am I serving? And as we do that, the spirit fills us. It's an

amazing thing. We're to be servants. That's all we're to long for on our graves. The servant of all. The servant of all.

Let's pray together. And he said to them, if anyone would come up, be first. He must be the last, and the servant of all. Our father, forgive us that so often we don't serve. We long for status and adulation. Oh, father, thank you that we follow the one that did not seek to serve, but to be served, that did not seek to be served, but to serve and give his life as a ransom for many. And, Lord, as we teach Mark's gospel, help us to hold our nerves and to model service and to teach that to others, knowing that as we preach Christ, God will open blind eyes. Amen.