

WIDCØMBE

BAPTIST CHURCH

HOME GROUPS – THE CHURCH AND MISSION 1

To start:

Take a few minutes to think about where in the Bible we find references to the mission being a priority for God's people. Where do we first find mission as being on God's agenda?

Many Christians believe that mission is first mentioned at the end of the gospels/beginning of Acts with Jesus' commission to the disciples that they should preach the gospel to the ends of the earth (Matt 28:18-20; Acts 1:8). As we will see the whole of the Bible shows us that God has a heart for mission that commences in Genesis and extends through to Revelation. Someone has commented that the Bible is mission-focussed and that mission should be at the heart of the church's activity.

Mission is not so much what *we do* – it arises from the heart of God as revealed in his Word. We are his agents in his mission to reach the world for Christ.

1. Read Gen 3:1-9

Questions:

- What were the immediate consequences of sin entering the world (vs 7)?
- What was the effect on the man and woman's relationship with God (vs 8)?
- What was God's response to the man and woman hiding (vs 9)?
- What does this teach us about God and his initiative as a seeker?

Gen 3:15 is seen as the first statement that God would deal with the problem of sin and Gen 3:21 is the first reference to sacrifice as a means of providing a covering for the man and woman's nakedness and shame. All of these are initiatives taken by God to respond to the dilemma brought about by their sin.

2. Read Gen 12:1-3

Questions:

- Is there any evidence from this passage that Abraham was a seeker after God? (Read Josh 24:1-3)
- What were the reasons that God chose Abraham?

God promised to bless not only Abraham but that, through him, all peoples (ethnic groups) would be blessed. This promise was reiterated to Abraham in Gen 18:18 and 22:18 and was also given to Isaac and Jacob - compare Gen 26:1-5; 28:10-14 and note the similarities.

Read Gal 3:6-9. How does Paul describe this promise given to Abraham (vs 8)?

Read Ex 19:4-6

Note how God refers to his people as a 'treasured possession' but that "the whole earth is mine". God's concern therefore extends beyond his own people. In this context what is the importance of God's people being referred to as:-

- A kingdom of priests?
- A holy nation?

Consider Deut 26:18-19; 28:9-10. Israel was marked out to be a special people, called and chosen by God, to be a witness to the nations around them. This was not for any neutral purpose but that the nations too would come to know and fear God and praise him – this theme is developed in the next reading.

3. Read Ps 67:1-7

Questions:

- What is the psalmist's request in vs 1? (compare Num 6:24-26 – the Aaronic blessing).
- What is the psalmist's request in vs 2?
- How was it intended that God's ways and salvation would come to the nations on earth?
- What benefits will come to the nations (vs 4)?

- What is the final result of God's blessing on his people and the nations (vv 3, 5, 7).

Here we see God's intention to bless his people and, through them, all nations of the earth. The final objective of this is that all nations will praise God and fear him.

4. Read Isa 43:9-11 and Isa 49:5-6

Questions:

- In Isa 43 what was Israel called to be (vs 10) and to whom (vs 9)?
- What was Israel called to act as witness concerning (vs 11)?
- In Isa 49:6 what was Israel's mission (compare Isa 45:22-23 and Acts 13:47)?

These verses demonstrate the important role of Israel in acting as a witness to the nations of the fact that God alone is God a saviour and a means of bringing light and salvation to the Gentiles

5. Read Matt 28:18-20 and Acts 1:8

Questions:

- On whose authority were the apostles directed to preach the gospel?
- What were the apostles commanded to do?
- What was the geographical extent of the apostles' mandate?

From this we can see that Jesus' command was consistent with the declaration of God throughout the Old Testament that, through his people, all ethnic groups would be blessed. The direction first given to Abraham was passed to the nation of Israel and is now the responsibility of the church.

6. Read Matt 24:14 and Rev 5:9; 7:9

Questions:

- What did Jesus declare to be the geographical extent of the preaching of the gospel?
- What is the link between the preaching of the gospel to all nations (ethnic groups) and his second coming?
- Which people groups did the apostle John see in Heaven in the revelation God gave him?

Some have seen a clear link between reaching all people groups with the gospel and the return of Jesus on the basis of these verses. There is an urgency on the part of many missionary organisations to reach the remaining people groups who have not heard the gospel, in the belief that Jesus will not return until all such groups have been reached by the gospel.

To end:

How has this study changed your perspective of the Bible's emphasis on mission and God's heart to reach all people groups with the gospel from the beginning?

As a Bible believing church and Bible believing Christians we need to capture something of God's vision for reaching all nations with the gospel. If we are to be obedient to God's commands we cannot be neutral about this as individuals or as a church. We will be either senders of missionaries or goers.

In our second study we will see the importance of mission as something of a continuum which commences where we are and extends to the ends of the earth as we chart the progress of mission through the pages of the New Testament.

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BAPTIST CHURCH

HOME GROUPS – THE CHURCH AND MISSION 2

In our first study we considered God's priority to reach all nations and people groups with the good news of salvation. We saw that Mission is not so much what ***we do*** – it arises from the heart of God as revealed in his Word. We also saw that God used his own people in the Old Testament to act as a witness and a light to the nations round about them. This theme is continued in the New Testament.

To start:

How did Jesus' own ministry of preaching the good news of the gospel reflect the heart of God for reaching the whole world? What evidence can you find that Jesus reached out beyond the Jews? (Consider Matt 8:5-13; 28-34; 15:21-28; John 4:1-42).

Jesus' ministry was primarily concentrated within the borders of Israel but he went out of his way to minister to Gentile communities. He often met greater faith and reception to the gospel amongst the Gentiles.

7. Read Matt 28:18-20; Mark 16:15-18; Luk 24:44-47 and Acts 1:8

These are four accounts of Jesus commission to the apostles.

- What distinguishes these accounts
- List below the various objectives that Jesus had for the gospel to be spread by the apostles

It has been observed that Mark's account is an 'evangelistic' commission, that of Matthew is a 'church planting' commission, that of Luke is a 'teaching' commission and that in the Acts is a 'global' commission.

Notice that Matthew precedes his commission with the statement of Jesus: "*All authority in Heaven and on earth has been given to me*" and that Acts, records Jesus linking the commission to the apostles with the promise of the Holy Spirit. What do these two statements teach us about our dependency on God for the work of reaching the lost?

Notice that Jesus defines ever growing geographical spheres of influence (Acts 1:8). What do you consider to be our responsibilities to spread the gospel in the light of this?

8. Read Acts 2:1-13

- Summarise what is happening in these verses
- In what ways is Jesus' commission to the apostles being worked out?
- What groups of people were present in Jerusalem at this time?
- What was the response of the crowds (c.f. vv37, 41)?

Those in Jerusalem were Palestinian Jews and Jews who had gathered from surrounding areas (including Hellenistic Jews) as well as proselytes (i.e. Gentiles who had converted to Judaism). Peter's audience was therefore a largely Jewish one. The crowds included visitors from Rome (vs 10) who may well subsequently have been the earliest converts in the Church at Rome (the church there was established without any direct apostolic involvement – Paul had never visited Rome prior to his letter to this church [Rom 1:13]).

9. Read Acts 8:1-8; 26-40

Questions:

- How does the scattering of the church correspond with the great commission?
- What means did God use to encourage the spread of the preaching of the word?

Philip (one of the Greek speaking Jews and a deacon) preached in Samaria and was then taken by the Spirit to evangelise the Ethiopian eunuch, an important government official. The word of God is thus spread to Samaria and to Africa because of the persecution following the death of Stephen.

10. Read Acts 10:9-23

Questions:

- What was the purpose of this vision to Peter?
- Describe Peter's immediate response?
- Explain Peter's developing response to the incident in Cornelius' home (vv 23, 34-35, 45, 48).

This is a further example of the gospel being preached to non-Jews. Notice Peter's initial reluctance over the matter of the command in the vision and his growing realisation that the same gospel to the Jews was also for the Gentiles. Notice also his amazement that the Gentiles had a similar experience to the disciples at Pentecost and his willingness in vs 48 to accept hospitality at the home of a Gentile. Peter had to subsequently justify his actions to the Jerusalem Church (Acts 11:1-3)

11. Read Acts 11:19-26

Questions:

- What prompted the spread of the gospel to Antioch?
- What is the significance of the gospel being taken to Greeks in Antioch?
- Explain how the Jerusalem Church reacted to the news that the gospel was preached at Antioch?
- What impressions are we encouraged to draw from Barnabas' conduct in this matter?

Here we see the first church being established in a Gentile territory which included Gentiles as well as Jews. Barnabas and Paul played a significant part in discipling this church. Interestingly it was here, first, that the disciples were called Christians.

12. Read Acts 13:1-3, 46-49; 14:26-28

Questions:

- What role did Barnabas and Saul (Paul) play in the Church at Antioch (c.f. Acts 11:26)?
- What event prompted Barnabas and Paul to be 'set apart' for mission?
- What part did the Antioch Church play in Barnabas and Paul's future ministry – is this significant?
- What is the significance of Paul's statement in Acts 13:46? How does Paul justify this statement (vs 47)? How did the Gentiles respond (vs 48)? What was the result (vs 49)?
- How significant is it that Barnabas and Paul returned to Antioch after the completion of the task? What were they able to report to the church?

These verses are vitally important. The Church at Antioch, rather than the Church at Jerusalem, was the church that reached out into Gentile territory (Paul was later to see his ministry as substantially to the Gentiles). The Holy Spirit identified Barnabas and Paul, and the church commissioned them to the task in spite of the fact that they were influential leaders in the church who, humanly, could not be spared by the church. The church at Antioch was their 'sending church'. Their return at the end of the task was a recognition that this church had commissioned them and they owed it to the church to report on what God had done through them in opening "*... a door of faith to the Gentiles*".

To end:

We have seen how quickly the apostles obeyed the commission on the Day of Pentecost and how God-fearing Jews from every nation were amongst the crowds that heard the message. This was God-ordained to enable the gospel to be spread a great distance very quickly.

Other initiatives that were subsequently taken are seen to be due to the intervention of God – e.g. the persecution following Stephen's death, Philip evangelising the Ethiopian eunuch, the incident at Cornelius' house, The Holy Spirit setting apart Barnabas and Paul. It is important to appreciate that God must take the initiative. Jesus instructed his disciples to ask the Lord of the harvest to send out labourers. It is his initiative not ours.

It is instructive to see the role of the Antioch Church. They were prepared to sacrifice important leaders, they commissioned them and they gathered together to welcome them back and hear from them. The Church at Antioch was the starting point on each of Paul's three missionary journeys.

This study provides us with a pattern. The spread of the message must start where we are. However it is to spread from us in ever-widening circles. The commission to reach all-nations is an entire biblical mandate and the church has the responsibility to be senders of those who go as well as those who are sent.