

Biblical Mission Work Demands Proclamation¹

By Bob Young

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I am committed to the biblical description of the church

When I read about the early church in Acts, I find a biblical description of the church. I find a biblical description of the mission of the church. I find a description of how the church sought to fulfill its mission. Based on the history I read in the book of Acts....

- I understand the nature of the church
- I understand what the church did and what were the priorities of the church
- I understand how the church lived out the Great Commission
- I understand how mission work was done in the first century; I understand the purpose for sending out missionaries, I understand how the missionaries interacted with lost people.

In the letters of the New Testament, I find additional teaching about the nature, purpose, and activities of the church.

I am committed to the missionary purpose Jesus described

Jesus was the first missionary. God sent Jesus. He came with God's mission. He came with God's message. Jesus came to do God's work. Jesus came to embody truth and grace together (John 1). He came as Son of God and as Son of Man. The Word was made flesh. Jesus came as faithful and merciful high priest. He came to reveal God, he came to bring into focus the plight of all humanity. The gospel message is that he came to save from sin.

Two dangers. When I look at Jesus and focus primarily on man's fallenness and God's harsh judgment against sin, I miss the message of grace and help. I miss what he wants to provide for me and I fail to understand his ministry during his time on this earth. The message cannot be summarized by condemnation. On the other hand, when I look at Jesus and focus almost exclusively on his love, mercy and grace, I easily miss the great truths of his life—his divinity, his eternal quality as God's Son, that he is in fact God, and that when he returns he will separate the believers from the unbelievers in judgment. The message cannot be summarized by love. The gospel message only makes sense when Jesus is presented in his entirety—truth and grace.

Jesus began his ministry (Luke 4:14-21) by describing his reason for coming. When he speaks in the synagogue, one of the first groups he mentions is the poor. Jesus did not come to deliver the poor from their physical circumstances and poverty; he came to preach good news to the poor. He did not come to fix the inequities of the world. He came to rescue the poor from their sins so that sin would have no power over them. (In fact, Jesus came to do this for all people, Luke 19:10, to seek and to save the lost.) Jesus came to rescue the poor from eternal condemnation and separation from God, to show all people the way home to God.

The authors of the New Testament tell us what is most important about Jesus

The authors of the New Testament realized that the essence of the story of Jesus could not be told by focusing primarily on his kindness toward others, his ministry of healing, and his mercy. The story of Jesus is told in his death, resurrection, and exaltation. All four gospels point to this supreme truth.

¹ This posting contains an article (pp. 1-2), a summary that was posted on Facebook (p. 3), and notes for application (p. 3). Thank you to David Young for the reminder, germ thoughts, and for some quotes; see his book, *New Day*.

Jesus came to deal with the problem of sin. The only problem the world has is sin. Most of the things that are identified today as problems are really symptoms; they are the result of the real problem. What we see as problems arise because of the entry of sin into the world and because of the continuing presence of sin in this world. That means that the only way to ultimately solve the world's problems is to deal with the sin problem. The only solution to the problem of our world is Jesus Christ. The message that matters is the message of the gospel—Jesus' death and resurrection.

Many Christians today seem to have forgotten what is most important about Jesus

Many well-meaning Christians think that the message of Jesus is a message of benevolent love and loving relationships. The love and relationships Jesus demonstrated during his ministry would mean nothing were it not for his death for all mankind. Jesus' service was powerful because of his sacrifice. He came to serve and to give his life as a ransom for all. Without the proclamation of the gospel, Jesus' love and relationships are no different from other wonderfully benevolent persons—one may think of Gandhi, Mother Teresa, or others. When we focus on Jesus' love and relationships as of first importance, we corrupt the message of the kingdom of God and the Lordship of Jesus. The message of Jesus is not first a message of love and relationships.

Track with me. Following Jesus does not call one first to do good works among the poor, needy, and marginalized in our world. Following Jesus first calls one to repentance and submission. The first message is eternal. What was your first response to the gospel? Was it to do good works? Or was it to repent and obey for salvation? The first message of missions, even to the poor and marginalized, is that all must repent of their sins and enter the kingdom. Jesus never encouraged people to stay in rebellion against God. He never invited them to stay as they were spiritually. He invited them to spiritual newness as the first step toward a complete remake of life.

Jesus is not coming back to snuggle up with everyone and make them feel good about him so they know his love firsthand. Jesus is coming back to judge the world. Those who accept Jesus as he is revealed in the New Testament will see people's lives turned upside down, not because of the benevolent works done and the Christian love extended, but because Jesus changes everything when he makes us new creation.

When mission work is done as the early church did it, that is, when the gospel is preached, the devil aggressively opposes such efforts. The pagans try to silence it; other religions try to squelch it. Mission work that answers God's purpose is often dangerous.

Conclusion

I am not opposed to benevolent work as a part of the work of God's church. I am against benevolence being substituted for the proclamation of the gospel. (I am opposed to any substitute for the proclamation of the gospel.) I am opposed to putting benevolence in first place so that the real purpose of the church and the real purpose of missions are lost. The church does not exist to feed people, clothe people, help people with physical needs, and comfort people in their difficulties in this life. The church exists to bring people to Jesus. Mission work is first and foremost about proclamation. The church's priority, always, wherever it is, is to make disciples. The church that understands the mission priority of the gospel will send proclaimers. The church that understands God's mission will seek souls and measure success in souls saved, disciples developed, and members matured.

What I want to say constantly and consistently about mission work is that preaching the gospel is always the first priority. People will never come running to Jesus "purely out of love" (as is often mistakenly taught and believed). Too often, our mission work leaves the impression that people are already pretty good—even good enough, because little is said about the sin problem and resolving the sin problem is not the first priority. When the message of the gospel is not the centerpiece of our mission work, we leave the impression that people are not lost. We fail to say that people need to be saved and that eternal salvation is their greatest need in this world. When we fail to make our first priority the salvation of souls, we leave the impression that salvation is not God's first priority. We leave the impression that Jesus' coming to die, to seek and to save the lost, was pointless. Preach the gospel! Make disciples!

Facebook Posting

It's Sunday Again--God's Mission Work Requires Proclamation

Today's "sermon," four points and the "so what"--

- *Jesus described his mission as preaching good news (Lk 4) and seeking and saving the lost (Lk 19)

- *The Bible describes the church's mission--what and how (Acts)

- *The Gospels suggest what is most important about Jesus by their focus on salvation through his death and resurrection

- *Many Christians today seem to have forgotten what is most important about Jesus

"The church exists to bring people to Jesus. Mission work is first and foremost about proclamation. The church's priority is to make disciples. The church that understands the mission of the church will send proclaimers. The church that fulfills God's mission will seek souls and measure success in souls saved, disciples developed, and members matured. In biblical mission work, preaching the gospel is always the first priority."

Application Notes

A reader commented, "Have read the post twice, trying to think about personal application." Good reminder. My weekly "sermon notes" are brief, often lacking application. I see three applications in my own life.

I must define my personal mission. Jesus described his mission—to preach good news, to proclaim liberty and sight, and to free the oppressed. As a Messianic text, the application of the Old Testament prophecy surpasses physical deliverance. Jesus was talking about spiritual blindness and sight, spiritual freedom. Since that was Jesus' mission, that is also my mission—seeking and saving, pointing the lost to the Savior. The primary mission of my life is informed by eternity—seeking souls, proclaiming good news, proclaiming spiritual freedom. Whatever physical needs I encounter, my mission is souls. The mission is person to person; I want to learn more and more about how to "think souls."

I must see the church's mission—the what and the how. In my own life and in the life of the church, I compare the mission approaches we are using to the mission work I read about in Scripture. "Where are the biblical texts that inform our 'mission work?'" In my tribe, we have been focused on biblical models of the church but we have strayed from the biblical description of the church's mission. I must study the biblical mission model and seek to follow God's wisdom.

I must see the importance of the gospel message. The Jesus story is primarily a story about a Savior. It is a story of saving sacrifice more than benevolent service. Jesus' compassion would have no significance beyond any other compassionate person were it not for his sacrificial, saving death and resurrection. The gospel story, and the mission of the church, cannot exist without a focus on what matters about Jesus' life—bringing people under the umbrella of the Lordship of Jesus so that they can be eternally saved. This is my story—this is my primary subject, this is what I talk about, this is what I share, this is what I think about, this is what I write about.

#thinksouls. I am always trying to grow in my ability to "think souls." Every person I see is a soul, every person I meet is a person in need of Jesus. I am always asking, probing, exploring spiritual understandings and experiences, seeking entry points.