

Intentional missions

2 Corinthians 5:17-21

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¹⁷ Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.

In these verses Paul is writing to the church in Corinth, which he had begun years before. Many of them had come from a pagan background and their lives had been dramatically changed by the saving grace of Jesus Christ. Paul is taking them back to this fact.

In these verses Paul is taking them back to their identity in Christ. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come. It is the same for us. In the words of scripture, we who were strangers have been brought near. We who had been orphaned have now been adopted. We who were exiles have now been made citizens. We who were slaves have now been made sons. We who were lost have now been found. We who were cast out have been brought in. We who were enemies have now been reconciled to God.

¹⁸ All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; ¹⁹ that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation.

Through the death and resurrection of Christ, God has reconciled us to Himself. We who were condemned and separated have now been made right with God. We have been reconciled so that we can be reconcilers.

In the words of Jesus, ***“As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you”*** (John 20:21b). This is our destiny, our calling, our purpose, our identity. We must not reduce missions down to what we do, we must first recognize that it is who we are. In Christ, we are children of light (John 12:35-36) and by definition we were made to shine.

We see this imagery of light throughout scripture. 1 Peter 2:9 declares, ***“But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.”***

Why are we a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation and a people for his own possession? So that we may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.

As Jesus had commanded, ***“In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven”*** (Matthew 5:16).

Let me explain it this way. Have you ever been outside the city on a dark night and seen a full moon? It’s beautiful, isn’t it? Almost mesmerizing. We may comment to another how beautiful the light of the moon is, but that is not true. The light that we are seeing is from the sun. The moon merely reflects the light of the sun. With Christ it is similar. He is the Light of the world (John 8:12), but at the same time we are commanded to let our light shine before others. How can that be? The light in us is not really ours. It is merely a display of the light of Christ in us. We are merely the candle, but he is the flame. Like the moon, we were dark, cold, without life. But now that the Christ has come, we are alive in Christ and called to reflect the light of Christ.

As Jesus said in John 8:12, ***“I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness but will have the light of life.”*** We now have the light, His light, and are now to be the lights of the world. As Jesus had declared, ***“You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven”*** (Matthew 5:14-16). We are light and by definition we were made to shine. We must understand that we have been reconciled and by definition we are to bring others to reconciliation. Paul then explains our identity another way.

²⁰ Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. ²¹ For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

The Greek word for ambassador had two corresponding definitions that are meaningful to Paul’s writing. In Paul’s day there were two types of Roman provinces. One was under the control of the senate and the other under the control of the Emperor. Peaceful provinces reported to the senate. Provinces that were turbulent or hinted of rebellion were directly accountable to the Emperor. In the imperial province the man who oversaw the province on behalf of the Emperor used the word for ambassador that Paul is using here. This ambassador was one who was directly in contact with and directly accountable to the Emperor. When an imperial ambassador spoke, it carried the message and the authority of the Emperor.

The second use of Paul’s word for ambassador is also interesting. When a country was conquered and about to be made part of the Roman Empire, 10 “ambassadors” were sent to work alongside the victorious Roman general to arrange the terms of peace with their defeated foe. They would determine

the boundaries, draw up a constitution and then submit these documents to the senate to be ratified. These “ambassadors” were the ones responsible for ushering these foreigners of the new province into the family of the Roman Empire. In a similar way, Paul sees himself and all believers as ambassadors whose responsibility is to usher those who used to be aliens, strangers, and enemies of God, now into the family of God.

Think again of these two meanings for “ambassador”. The first spoke only the Emperor’s words to the people with the full authority of the Emperor. The second ushered the foreigner into the family of the Roman Empire.

In today’s world an ambassador’s responsibility is to relate merely as a representative of the leaders of his home country. He passes on the message and desires of the government which he is from. He is not a citizen in the new land. He is only a visitor. He will likely never fit in as one from that country and that should not surprise him. That is who we are in Christ. We are only visiting earth. As followers of Christ we will never fully fit in. Heaven is our home. Our responsibility and privilege is to pass on the message of Christ so that the people of the world will hear and be reconciled to Him. We are ambassadors of Christ.

The reputation and honor of the ambassador’s country many times depends on the ambassador. Most will never meet another person from his country. His actions and words are observed and often attributed to all the people who live in his country. We, too, may be the only Christian that our coworkers or neighbors know. We must understand the burden that we bear. Through our lives we have the potential to turn people towards Christ or away from Him. Either way, their understanding of who or what a Christian is will many times be informed by what they have seen in us.

There is no need to ask God if we are to be on mission with Him. The scriptures make it clear. We are Ambassadors of Christ. We each should intentionally begin preparing ourselves for the Spirit's leading as we live on mission with God.

Once we know our mission identity, there is no longer a question about if we are to be on mission with God. The questions now change to when, how, who, and what. Being on mission with God is not accidental, it must be intentional.

One way is to begin to create margin in your life. That means to manage your time in ways that you have extra time to minister to others. Manage your finances in ways so that you can have extra money to help others in need. It is just managing your life in such a way that you can be prepared to be used by God at any time. It would be horrible for God to call you to help someone, but you have no flexibility to say, “yes”.

Another intentional way to prepare to be on mission with God is to live holy lives. The things you say. The way you dress. The way you treat people. The way you serve people. What you post on Instagram or Facebook. What you do in your free time. Are you prepared to be a conduit that the Holy Spirit can pour through, or is your life not blessable?

Prayer, Care, Share

One intentional strategy that we continue to use here at our church is Prayer, Care, Share. If we are to be Christ's ambassadors, where do we start? Prayer.

Prayer

Salvation is the work of God in the heart of man, so we are greatly mistaken if we think that our own words, eloquence or personality will persuade someone to trust in Christ. Prayer is essential because the working of the Spirit is essential. As Christ said, **"without me you can do nothing"** (John 15:5b). Certainly, without God's grace no man will believe (1 Cor. 2:14).

One way to intentionally be on mission with God through prayer is by starting the morning with a simple prayer of, "God, please bring someone across my path today who needs to know about the love of Jesus." Pray that God would open a door for the message (Col. 4:3). Pray that we would proclaim it clearly (Col 4:4). Pray that we would be wise in the way we act toward outsiders (Col. 4:5). Pray that we would make the most of every opportunity (Col. 4:5). Pray that our conversation would be filled with grace so that we may know how to answer everyone (Col. 4:6). Pray that words may be given us so that we will fearlessly make known the mystery of the Gospel (Eph. 6:19). Pray that we may declare it fearlessly (Eph. 6:20). Pray that the Holy Spirit would convict them in regard to sin, righteousness and judgment (John 16:18). Pray that we would not be ashamed to testify about our Lord (2 Tim. 1:7), but that God would draw the unbeliever to Himself (John 6:44). And finally, after you have sown the word, pray the Lord would send workers into his harvest field (Luke 10:2).

Prayer is important because salvation is a spiritual act of God. Prayer prepares the soil of the heart for the seed of the gospel that will be planted later.

Care

When you hear the testimonies of other Christians, they often start like this. "I had a neighbor . . . there was a coworker . . . I met a classmate . . . I had a family member . . ." They tell of a relationship that God used to draw them to Himself. Not that a relationship has the power to bring someone to Christ, for that can only be done by the Holy Spirit, but somehow God worked in the lives of these believers in such a way that it turned the attention of the unbeliever towards Christ.

We find this truth in Matthew 5:16: **"Let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven."** First God transforms our lives so that we selflessly begin to care for others. He then uses our love for others as a tool to turn an unbeliever's attention towards Himself. Evangelism is the work of God from beginning to end, but yet He invites us into the process.

It is an expression of 1 John 4:19: **"We love each other because he loved us first."**

Through Christ, our lives are transformed so that we love our enemies, forgive those who have wronged us, give to those in need, and speak blessings instead of curses. As a supernatural love for others takes root in our lives, a watching world will see that we are different. It will provoke questions causing

unbelievers to ask the reason for the way that we live. Jesus will be proclaimed and He will draw people to Himself.

The only reason that we are moved to die to self and bear each other's burden is because Christ did it for us first. Our good deeds do not have the power to lead someone to Christ. Only the Holy Spirit can convict of sin, reveal the good news of Jesus, and grant faith to a sinful heart. Our caring is just a tool in the hand of the Savior.

Share

Romans 10:13-14 says this, *“Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved. How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them?”* Preaching is key to hearing and believing.

Matthew 16:15-17 is an important verse as we seek to understand how one comes to salvation in Jesus Christ: *“Who do you say that I am?” Simon Peter replied, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.” And Jesus answered him, “Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven.”*

To share is to set before them the simple facts of the Gospel. That because of our sin, all mankind has been separated from a holy, righteous and loving God. That the wages of sin is death and because of our sin we deserve condemnation and eternal separation from God in a place of endless torment, called hell.

God, seeing our desperate need, sent His Son down from heaven to earth to become a man in the person of Jesus Christ. Jesus lived a sinless life and willingly laid down His life for our sake and was crucified on a Roman cross. In this act He sought to pay for our sins so that we could be reconciled to God. Three days later he was raised from the dead, conquering sin and death. All who will repent and believe in Jesus Christ will be saved.

Through prayer, care and share one becomes open and hears the gospel. This same strategy can be used by a church, zone, or small group as well as they plan events centered on prayer, care and share. The prayer event lays a spiritual foundation. The care event builds relationships and meets needs. The share event clearly preaches the gospel message.

Charles Spurgeon once said: *“If Jesus is precious to you (as he is to the Spirit), you will not be able to keep your good news to yourself; you will be whispering it into your child’s ear; you will be telling it to your husband; you will be earnestly imparting it to your friend; without the charms of eloquence you will be more than eloquent; your heart will speak, and your eyes will flash as you talk of his sweet love... It cannot be that there is a high appreciation of Jesus and a totally silent tongue about him... If you really know Christ, you are like one that has found honey; you will call others to taste of its sweetness; you are like the beggar who has discovered an endless supply of food; you must go tell the hungry crowd that you have found Jesus, and you are anxious that they should find him too.”*

I love that quote, but how many of us are not at that point in our Christian life? If not, how do we get there?

If our missions identity affects all of life, then “disobedience” reveals an identity crisis that needs discipleship and pastoral care. We are acting “unnaturally” in regard to the new nature that we have been given in Christ. It would be like the story of the baby eagle that somehow ended up being raised with a group of baby chickens. He was happy pecking corn in the farmyard, even though he was created to soar with the eagles, but since he did not realize who he was, since he did not know his identity, he lived with the limitations and the perspective of a chicken, fighting over corn kernels, when he was made for so much more. It was only after the full-grown eagle sought him out that he realized his true identity.

To walk in this missions identity and be on mission with God, we first need to have been reconciled with God. We can only give away what we have received. We also must be abiding in Christ. In Christ we have received all that we need for life and godliness. May we live on missions with God naturally as we read His Word, spend time in prayer, live rightly with His people and seek to be used of God.

Discussion Questions:

- 1) If you are already a believer, who or what did God use in your life to bring you to salvation?
- 2) In your opinion, why do Christians find it difficult to live on mission with God in their daily lives?
- 3) What in this lesson was most meaningful to you?
- 4) In your own words, how would you explain the idea of being an ambassador of Christ?
- 5) How can we be intentional about preparing ourselves to be on mission with God?
- 6) What do you think God wants you to remember from this lesson on Intentional Missions?
- 7) What do you believe God wants you to do in response to this lesson?
