

THE MISSION OF THE CHURCH

Introduction

- Provide your definitions for the following words.

Job –

Mission –

- Why is it important to keep those definitions straight? List some possible consequences of thinking of a mission as a job or a job as a mission.

Raison D'être

It is vital that congregations are clear about and committed to their mission. For a mission provides the congregation's *raison d'être*, "the reason to be."

In philosophy, an individual's or organization's *raison d'être* are the activities that justify existence. To state it negatively, if those activities were *not* being performed, there would be little reason for that individual or organization to exist.

An organization will probably have many important jobs and tasks it performs. Perhaps it fails to perform all those jobs and tasks well. Maybe some of those jobs and tasks slip through the cracks at times. While not good, that organization still has a reason to exist. It simply needs to focus on bettering its operations. However, if an organization does not carry out its mission, it ceases to have a *raison d'être*. If it ceased to exist, few would feel any real pain.



So it is with congregations. There are many jobs and tasks in a church. A congregation might not do them all well. That is no reason for panic. It simply means some analysis and planning needs to be done. However, if a congregation fails to carry out its mission, then there is no reason for that congregation to exist anymore. It could disappear without significant consequence.

In this study, we will look at the Biblical concept of *mission*. We will examine key passages that speak to the mission of the Church. We will see the need for a congregation to not only understand all aspects of the mission of the Church but also to commit to all aspects in their ministry efforts.

PART 1 - THE CONCEPT OF “MISSION” IN SCRIPTURE

- In 60 seconds, write down some events or activities that people might describe as a “mission.”

- Chances are there are some very different tasks listed above. What are some things all those tasks have in common?

The commonalities in Biblical “missions”

Joshua 22:3

For a long time now—to this very day—you have not deserted your fellow Israelites but have carried out the mission the LORD your God gave you.

1 Samuel 15:17-18

Samuel said, “Although you were once small in your own eyes, did you not become the head of the tribes of Israel? The Lord anointed you king over Israel. And he sent you on a mission, saying, ‘Go and completely destroy those wicked people, the Amalekites; wage war against them until you have wiped them out.’”

Acts 12:25

When Barnabas and Saul had finished their mission, they returned from Jerusalem, taking with them John, also called Mark.

Scripture uses different words to capture the concept of *mission*.

In Joshua 22, Joshua is talking to warriors from the tribes of Reuben, Gad, and Manasseh. These tribes settled east of the Jordan River, but they had spent years helping their brother Israelite tribes capture land west of the river. Joshua tells them that they have now fulfilled their mission. The Hebrew word is a form of *mishmereth*, which can be translated a variety of ways: charge, duty, obligation. Indeed, we often picture a mission as being something we do with a sense of duty.

In 1 Samuel 15, Samuel reminds King Saul that he had a mission to prevent Israel from falling under pagan influence. Samuel uses a form of the Hebrew word *derek*, which can be translated as “way” or “road” or “journey.” We sometimes picture a mission as a long, adventurous path that must be traveled.

In Acts 12, we read that Barnabas and Saul (not yet renamed “Paul”) were on a mission trip. The word translated “mission” there is a form of the Greek word *diakonia*, which means “service” or “ministry.” We also will often picture a mission as something being done to serve and help others.

1 John 4:14

We have seen and testify that the Father has sent his Son to be the Savior of the world.

John 19:28-30

Later, knowing that everything had now been finished, and so that Scripture would be fulfilled, Jesus said, “I am thirsty.” A jar of wine vinegar was there, so they soaked a sponge in it, put the sponge on a stalk of the hyssop plant, and lifted it to Jesus’ lips. When he had received the drink, Jesus said, “It is finished.” With that, he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.

Ephesians 4:10

He who descended is the very one who ascended higher than all the heavens, in order to fill the whole universe.

- Does Jesus’ stated mission fulfill what we said were the two commonalities of all missions in Scripture?
- Jesus did not heal the sick or feed the 5,000 or cast out demons because those things were his mission. Miracles were not the end, not the means to the end. Jesus mission was to save. Miracles served Christ’s mission of being the Savior. How so?
- It is absolutely vital that a congregation distinguish between the end and the means to the end; i.e. between their God-given mission and the tasks and tactics that may serve that mission. Why? What might be some examples of ways congregations might confusing the end and the means to the end?

PART 2 - THE MISSION CHRIST HAS GIVEN TO THE CHURCH

Jesus gave lots of instructions to his followers. However, there are four places in Scripture that receive special attention because of *when* Jesus gives instructions—shortly before he ascended. In every instance, Jesus is speaking to a group—his disciples—not an individual. Since he 1) is speaking to his disciples and 2) the timing would seem to give these instructions extra *gravitas*, these portions of Scripture are often referred to as the Great Commission.

These passages give the Church—the body of believers—its *raison d’être*. Why? Because the activity Jesus calls for here is the work no one but the Church can or will do. As we look at the Great Commission passages, complete the corresponding chart, which highlights the consistency among them.

Matthew 28:18-20

Then Jesus came to them and said, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”

Mark 16:15-16

[Jesus] said to them, “Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation. Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned.

Luke 24:46-48

[Jesus] told them, “This is what is written: The Messiah will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, and repentance for the forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things.

Acts 1:8

Jesus said, “You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”

<i>Scripture</i>	<i>What is the mission?</i>	<i>Who is the target of this mission?</i>	<i>How is this mission carried out?</i>	<i>Where is this mission carried out?</i>
Matthew 28:18-20				
Mark 16:15				
Luke 24:46-48				
Acts 1:8				

Two key components of the Great Commission

1) _____.

The Great Commission passages have a clear outward focus. We are to “go” to “all nations.” “Go into all the world and preach the gospel.” We are to “be witnesses... to the ends of the earth.”

In other words, the first part of our mission is to focus on people *outside* the Church, individuals who are currently lost in their sin and doomed to an eternity in hell. Our responsibility is not to create faith. Only the Spirit can do that. However, the way the Spirit typically creates faith is through the efforts of believers as we share the gospel with unbelievers. “I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes” (Romans 1:16). As we carry out this aspect of the Great Commission, the Holy Spirit creates faith, pulling that individual into the Church.

This brings us to the second component of the Great Commission.

2) _____.

This second component has an inward focus. It is seen most clearly in Matthew’s Gospel, where Jesus says that the Great Commission includes “teaching them...” Once the Spirit has pulled an individual into the Church, our effort with God’s Word is not done! We lead people into the Word continually.

Jesus said, “These are the very Scriptures that testify about me” (John 5:39). As we study the Word, we grow in our understanding of Jesus and our love for him. A disciple is different than a student. A student simply wants to acquire knowledge. A disciple is a follower who wants a relationship with the teacher. For the disciple seeks to become more and more like the teacher.

Likewise, as part of discipleship, we seek to move along a spiritual spectrum in our effort to be more like Jesus. We want to grow in our knowledge of his Word. And we want to grow in our sanctified service of God and our neighbor.

- Earlier we said that a mission is a) a responsibility that is *handed down* from someone in authority and b) a *temporary* activity. Explain how evangelism and discipleship fit both of those descriptions of mission.
- Consider what can happen if a congregation focuses on only one aspect of the Great Commission. Imagine a church stresses evangelism but does not have a plan for how to approach discipleship. What might be the result? Now imagine a church expends all their human and financial resources on discipleship but does very little to teach or encourage evangelism. What might be the result?
- While Jesus gives the Church its mission, he does *not* command specific strategies or tactics to fulfill that mission. Why do you think that is the case?

PART 3 - MOTIVATED FOR MISSION

2 Corinthians 5:14-21

¹⁴For Christ's love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died. ¹⁵And he died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again.

¹⁶So from now on we regard no one from a worldly point of view. Though we once regarded Christ in this way, we do so no longer. ¹⁷Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here! ¹⁸All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: ¹⁹that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting people's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. ²⁰We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God. ²¹God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

- 2 Corinthians 5 is a beautiful summary of the respective missions of Christ and his Church. In the words of this text, how is Christ's mission described? How is our mission described?
- Paul says, "[Christ] has committed us to the message of reconciliation." What does that word "committed" imply to you?
- Explain each of the following statement "commits" us to Christ's mission, giving us powerful motivation to engage in both evangelism and discipleship.
 - a) "God... reconciled us to himself through Christ..."
 - b) "...one died for all..."
 - c) "We are therefore Christ's ambassadors..."
 - d) "... we regard no one from a worldly point of view."

Conclusion

The reason Christian congregations exist is to carry out Christ's mission. It is not wrong if Christian churches operate a food pantry or a hospital. Showing Christian compassion is a natural fruit of faith. Moreover, demonstrating compassion can create opportunities to share the gospel. However, if our church *doesn't* do these things, someone else will.

Nor is it wrong for a church, as part of its ministry, to teach children math and science. It shows love for children. Furthermore, those subjects can be taught from a Christian perspective. However, if our church *doesn't* teach math or science, our children can still achieve an education. (Parents will have to provide the Christian perspective.)

When it comes to evangelism and discipleship, there is no one who will take up these eternity-altering tasks other than the Church. Thus, those responsibilities are our "reason to be." They are our mission.

Further discussion

- A. We talked about pitfalls if congregations would stress only one-half of the Great Commission. What might be some reasons congregations would stress evangelism, but neglect discipleship? What might be some reasons congregations would stress discipleship, but not evangelism? How do we avoid that imbalance?

- B. In 2 Corinthians 5, we said that Christ has committed and motivated us to his mission. What might be ways a congregation demonstrated it was committed to evangelism? How might it demonstrate it is committed to discipleship?

- C. Someone says to you, "We preach law and gospel each week in worship. That is all we need to do to carry out Christ's mission." Respond.

- D. Scripture says our mission should take place "in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." List some things that might mean for our individual congregation.