

Our Mission

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There are many followers of Jesus, churches, and even Mission Boards that believe that our mission is global evangelization. If this is true, we have an enormous task. If this is not our mission, what is?

Let's look at a few texts in order to understand our mission. The followers of Jesus who believe that our mission consists of global evangelization normally look to Acts 1.8. We'll look at this text, but also Matthew 28.18-20 and Luke 24.46-48. These three texts relate the last commandment of Jesus to His disciples. In these texts, Jesus gave them their mission. The three texts use different words to give different points of emphasis. It is interesting that Luke wrote two of these texts using different words – he wanted to relate different aspects of the mission to different readers. In this, we gain a deeper understanding of our mission. Let's look at the texts.

Acts 1.8 (NASB)

...but you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be my witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth.

This text presents to us our mission and the source of our power to complete it. The part about Jerusalem, Judea and Samaria, and the remotest part of the earth does not directly apply to our mission (this was written about the mission of the followers of Jesus in that time who lived in Jerusalem), but it does explain that the plan of God did not exclude anyone or any place. The will of God is that all the people in all the places of the world have the opportunity to hear the Good News about Jesus. The word “evangel” means “good news” and it is the root of the word “evangelism.” For this reason, many followers of Jesus believe that our mission is global evangelization. We will read the other two texts shortly in order to confirm or deny this idea.

How is it possible for all the people in all the places of the world to hear the good news about Jesus? The source of power to do this is the Holy Spirit. Truthfully, not even the fortune of King David would be sufficient to complete our mission. Why not? Because the source of power is the Holy Spirit, not money. In Acts 3 and 4, Peter and John were entering into the Temple in the hour of prayer. A lame beggar asked them for some money. Do you remember Peter's response?

Acts 3.6 (NASB)

But Peter said, “I do not possess silver and gold, but what I do have I give to you: In the name of Jesus Christ the Nazarene-walk!”

And, what happened? The power of the Holy Spirit cured this man. Today there are many churches in the opposite position. They look at the spiritually “lame” and say, “We have silver and gold so get on up, come on in, and bring your money with you and God will give you more.” And, what happens? There are many buildings called “churches” full of people who call themselves “Christians” or “believers” but who do not live life transformed by the Holy Spirit. We cannot put our faith in money. There is no spiritual power in money. The power to complete our mission has only one source – the Holy Spirit!

It is also written in this text that Jesus wanted His disciples to be His witnesses. But, witnesses to what? There are people who believe that their spiritual duty is to knock on a door, cite five or ten verses from the Bible and then ask if the person would like to pray a prayer in order not to go to Hell. Look, who would not like to avoid Hell? *Just one prayer and I can avoid Hell? Well, let's pray then!* is a common response. But, is it true that being a witness is merely this? No, it is not true!

In Acts 1, the disciples of Jesus chose a man from among them to replace Judas.

Acts 1.21-22 (NASB)

Therefore it is necessary that of the men who have accompanied us all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us—beginning with the baptism of John until the day that He was taken up from us—one of these must become a witness with us of His resurrection.

What did Peter say about the candidates? They had to have walked with Jesus from the beginning and they had to have seen Jesus after the resurrection, because the replacement would be a witness of the life and resurrection of Jesus. To be a witness of Jesus is to give testimony about the life of Jesus and the power of His resurrection in one's own life. There is no indication in the Bible that declares that being a witness of Jesus consists of merely knocking on doors, citing five or ten texts from the Bible and asking if someone wants to say a simple prayer.

Now, let's look at the other two texts in order to better understand our mission.

Luke also described our mission in this way:

Luke 24.45-49 (NASB)

Then [Jesus] opened their minds to understand the Scriptures, and He said to them, "Thus it is written, that the Christ would suffer and rise again from the dead the third day, and that repentance for forgiveness of sins would be proclaimed in His name to all the nations, beginning from Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things. And behold, I am sending forth the promise of my Father upon you; but you are to stay in the city until you are clothed with power from on high."

In this text we find a description of our mission that is similar to what we found in Acts 1.8. Here we again find that the disciples of Jesus were to start in Jerusalem. In this text Luke did not repeat the other locations. Rather than repeat "the remotest part of the earth" in this text, he explained that the goal of their mission was "to all the nations," to all the peoples (ethnics) of the earth. To accomplish this they would also receive power from on high, which Acts 1.8 indicates is the power of the Holy Spirit.

What Luke gave us here that we do not find in Acts 1.8 is more information in relation to the message that the disciples were to deliver to the peoples of the earth – the message of repentance from sin for forgiveness. But, it is not only this. They had to give testimony, not only of the sufferings and resurrection of Jesus, but also how all this fulfilled all that had been written – the prophecies of the Messiah.

Do you remember the two disciples travelling on the road from Jerusalem to Emmaus? What did Jesus do before leaving them that night? Let's read Luke 24.27 (NASB).

Then beginning with Moses and with all the prophets, [Jesus] explained to them the things concerning Himself in all the Scriptures.

In the same way, Philip explained to the Ethiopian everything about Jesus, how He fulfilled what had been written. Let's read Acts 8.35 (NASB).

Then Philip opened his mouth, and beginning from this Scripture he preached Jesus to him.

In the New Testament, to be a witness had nothing to do with knocking on a door, citing five or ten verses from the Bible out of their contexts and asking someone to pray a simple prayer. To be a witness had everything to do with giving someone an understanding of the Scriptures and an explanation of how Jesus fulfilled what had been written, including repentance for the forgiveness of sins.

So then, when we understand these two texts together, we discover that our mission is enormous, but we have an unlimited source of power. There is one more text to consider. Let's read it.

Matthew 28.18-20 (NASB)

And Jesus came up and spoke to them, saying, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age."

This text is the banner of our mission. Here Matthew shows us the big picture. The other two texts are very important too, but we have to understand the texts that contain less detail as they relate to the text that has the most detail. Here Matthew has given us a text with many important details and for this reason we must pay attention.

We have already read that the source of our power is the Holy Spirit of God. There is no limit to the power that is available to us. Now we know that our authority is the authority of Jesus, because God gave Him all the authority in heaven and on the earth. So then, we have power and authority without equal to fulfill our mission.

We have already read that the followers of Jesus would be His witnesses, explaining what had been written and how Jesus fulfilled all that had been written. The message also calls sinners to repentance. But, after repentance, what is necessary? Is it enough merely to repent and continue on as we were? No!

There is much confusion in relation to the command of this text. The command is not "go," but rather "make disciples!" The translation from the Greek should have been: "As you are going, MAKE DISCIPLES...". The meaning is that during our day-to-day life, we make disciples. At home, at work, at the gym, at the market, in the street – MAKE DISCIPLES. Among our friends, among our colleagues, with our family, with people we know – MAKE DISCIPLES. Many people believe that this text applies to the church, as an institution, but it does not. Jesus was talking to the eleven disciples, not to the church. This text applies to the disciples. This does not mean that any follower of Jesus can make disciples; it means that every follower of Jesus must make disciples.

Jesus commanded them to make disciples of all nations. The Greek word translated "nations" means "ethnics." This agrees with "the remotest part of the earth" that Luke wrote.

This is not about reaching government or countries. It is as God promised to Abraham – all the families of the earth would be blessed through him (Gen. 12.3). The plan of God has always included all the peoples of the earth; He never excluded any of them.

How is it that a follower of Jesus can make disciples of all the peoples? Individually it is not possible, but Jesus didn't intend for just one disciple to have all the responsibility of making disciples of all the peoples. One thing that he did intend is that we cannot exclude anyone for reasons of race or social class. Let me share a story to help clarify the mission of making disciples of all the peoples.

I was in a house church in the Serra Gaucha mountains in Rio Grande do Sul, Brazil. I was talking to the host, the owner of the house. In that city of about 20,000 people there is a colony of descendants of Japanese immigrants.

I asked, "Do you know any of the Japanese people who live here?"

"I know a few." He responded.

"Do they maintain contact with friends and relatives in Japan?"

"Many of them do."

"Did you know that we can reach people in Japan from here, from your living room?"

He had never thought about our mission in this way. In the same city he knows descendants of immigrants from Germany and Italy too. It is possible to touch Europe and Asia with the gospel from his house, from a little city in Rio Grande do Sul, Brazil.

The key is making disciples who will make disciples. There are few, if any, peoples in the world who do not have contact with people from outside themselves. Everyone in the world knows someone, who knows someone, who knows someone, until everyone in the world knows everyone through his or her friends – we call this the sphere of influence or the circle of friends. It is in this way that we can make disciples of all the peoples of the earth.

So then, how do we make disciples? Basically, a disciple is a person who dedicates himself or herself to follow the way of Jesus alone according to the Bible. A disciple of Jesus does not follow any other person (not the saints, not Mary, not the spirits, etc...).

When Jesus commanded His disciples to make disciples, He only used two phrases to explain what that entails. The order in which He placed these phrases is also very important, so pay attention.

First: "baptizing them in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit." I baptize in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Why? Because Jesus commanded me to baptize this way. Also, I baptize putting the person under the water. Why? Because the word "baptize" came from the Greek language, not from English. Centuries ago they did not translate the word, but imported it from Greek into other languages. With time the meaning of the original word was lost and the traditions of the church redefined the word. If they had translated the word from the beginning everyone today would know that the Greek word meant "to put under water" or "submerge." Baptizing in this way is not something magical, it is simply obedience. What do disciples of Jesus do? Disciples of Jesus obey all of His commands. If we had not lost the original meaning of the word, we would have an immersion of the new disciple instead of having a baptism. For this reason, I immerse the new disciple in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit because this is what Jesus commanded me to do.

Second: "teaching them to observe all that I have commanded." This part is not as complicated as it appears. We start with "love the Lord your God with all you being and your neighbor as yourself" and "MAKE DISCIPLES." The rest of the commandments of Jesus we

learn as we walk in His way, and it takes a lifetime to learn everything, but the extent to which we've learned already we must put into practice.

There are many churches that invert the order in this text. They look to teach through rules and require obedience to the rules before they will baptize, this is often a list of "sins" that the new disciple has to abandon before he or she can be baptized. It is interesting that the hidden sins of the church do not find their way onto the list. We are all sinners who do not deserve to be baptized, much less saved. Our purity comes from God; we are sanctified by the Holy Spirit day by day. So then, let's obey Jesus and baptize before we require obedience to a list of sins Jesus never gave us. (I will write more about baptism in the future in order to clarify many things about this doctrine).

Let's summarize our mission:

The source of our power is the Holy Spirit. Our authority is the authority of Jesus. Our task is not global evangelization, but global disciple-making. In order to make disciples we must be witnesses, we must baptize and we must teach the commands of Jesus. It is not so complicated, once we understand these three texts. But, in order to complete our mission, all churches must analyze everything they are doing. If a church's programs and ministries are not generating new disciples these programs and ministries must be changed. If it is not possible to change the programs and ministries so that they do produce new disciples, the church must abandon what it is doing. From this point on, we must do only those things which truly make disciples of Jesus. Any other thing (program, ministry, or activity) that we are doing impedes us in completing our mission, impedes us from obeying Jesus. So then, let's obey Jesus and complete our mission in the way He commanded us!