

“THE BIBLE: A MISSIONARY BOOK”

Matthew 5:13-14

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In Matthew 5.13-14 we find two mandates established for us by our Lord Jesus Christ in His famous Sermon on the Mount:

- 13 Ye are the salt of the earth: but if the salt have lost his savour, wherewith shall it be salted? it is thenceforth good for nothing, but to be cast out, and to be trodden under foot of men.**
- 14 Ye are the light of the world. A city that is set on an hill cannot be hid.**

In Matthew 5.13, the Lord Jesus Christ set forth what has been termed our *cultural mandate*. We are supposed to influence those around us, even if we are unable to bring them to Christ. Matthew 5.14 records our *evangelistic mandate*, and represents in a spiritually symbolic way what the Great Commission of our Lord Jesus Christ explicitly sets forth as every congregation's mission, to go into the world, to baptize those we have brought to Christ, and to train them to do all that Christ has commanded, Matthew 28.18-20.

"It is unscriptural to confuse these two mandates and speak of them on equal terms as missions and church ministries. Only the second mandate is considered missions in the strict biblical sense."¹ One of the great tragedies of the 21st century is the abandoning by so many Churches of our *evangelistic mandate* for what used to be called the social gospel, or the so-called "cultural mandate," at the expense of biblical missions.

God's plan for every Church congregation in this era of God's dealings with mankind, what we so frequently refer to as the Church Age, is clearly seen in the ministry and writings of the Apostle Paul, particularly in Acts 14.21-23:

- 21 And when they had preached the gospel to that city, and had taught many, they returned again to Lystra, and to Iconium, and Antioch,**
- 22 Confirming the souls of the disciples, and exhorting them to continue in the faith, and that we must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God.**
- 23 And when they had ordained them elders in every church, and had prayed with**

Footnotes:

- ¹ George W. Peters, *A Biblical Theology of Missions* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1972), p. 170, cited by Paul A. Beals, *A People For His Name* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 1988), page 3.
- ² Paul A. Beals, *A People For His Name* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 1988), page 3.
- ³ The ecclesiastical conflict that arose among American Baptists that led to identifying as Missionary Baptists or non-Missionary Baptists.
- ⁴ Genesis 3.21
- ⁵ Matthew 12.39; 16.4; Luke 11.29
- ⁶ Luke 19.10
- ⁷ Ephesians 2.14
- ⁸ 1 Thessalonians 1.7
- ⁹ 1 Thessalonians 1.7
- ¹⁰ 1 Thessalonians 1.8
- ¹¹ 1 Thessalonians 1.9
- ¹² 1 Thessalonians 1.10

Allow me to summarize some of the pertinent characteristics of New Testament missions in light of what we have rehearsed from the whole Bible. The New Testament leaves us with a commission. From the beginning of time, God has not been without a witness. Christ's mandate to our Church is crystal clear; it is not to be decided by congregational vote but is to be executed, is to be implemented (Matthew 28.19-20; Mark 16.15; Luke 24.44-49; John 20.21; Acts 1.8). The New Testament's missions message has God's glory as its goal and harvest as its goal. It is not enough to search for the sheep; we *must* find them.

We cannot be content with the proclamation of the Gospel. The harvest may be meager - a hundredfold, sixtyfold, or thirtyfold - but harvest there will be (Matthew 9.37-38; 13.23; 28.19). The New Testament reveals our proper priorities. Although believers, as a part of mankind, have valid societal responsibilities to perform good deeds, these duties must not *ever* take priority over our mission (Acts 14.21-23). Indeed, meeting societal needs should contribute to carrying out our commission.

Since we cannot carry out our mission by focusing all the resources at our disposal here in our Jerusalem and nowhere else, we choose to collaborate with missionaries with whom we agree, to whom we send monetary support, and for whom we pray, so that through them we become more obedient to our commission. In this way, we do a better job of fulfilling our mission, which serves to compliment Christ's mission, which perfectly accomplishes God's mission. Can anyone's life be lived to higher ends than these? Can anyone's efforts be expended in more noble pursuits than these? The answer, of course, is no.

This is why we preach the Gospel. This is why we bring the lost to Church. This is why we witness at work and in the neighborhood. This is why we gather for corporate evangelism. This is why we give to missions above our tithes and offerings. And this is why we have a missions conferences. For God's sake, for Christ's sake, for our Church's sake, for your own sake, and for the sake of those we seek to reach here and there with the Gospel, I urge you to prayerfully and energetically involve yourself in our Church's missions ministry by praying, by giving to missions, and by involving yourself in our ongoing missions emphasis.

fasting, they commended them to the Lord, on whom they believed.

The geographical setting of this passage is southern Galatia, in what is today Turkey. The date is around 46 AD, about seventeen years after the Day of Pentecost and near the end of Paul's first missionary journey. Though he always preached to the Jewish people whenever possible, the Apostle Paul launched out to reach the Gentiles, his primary target audience.²

Notice the three aspects of Paul's ministry pattern in this passage: *First*, he was engaged in evangelizing the lost. His first step to accomplishing this was to preach the Gospel. His next step was to gather those who had responded or were interested. This done, he moved on to the *second* aspect of his pattern, which was to edify believers by confirming them and by exhorting them to continue in the faith. The *third* aspect of Paul's ministry pattern (and you need to understand that all three steps were being done simultaneously) was to establish local Churches. Luke refers to this in verse 23 when he records that they ordained elders in every Church and then commended them to the Lord.

This is the inspired pattern every Church should seek to follow both here at home and also in their commitment to praying and paying for Gospel preaching, Church planting, missionaries. We know as Bible-believing Christians, and as members of a missionary Baptist Church, the entire Bible supports a commitment to this noble and God-honoring endeavor.³

Consider the various portions of the Bible that show this to be true:

First, GOD'S MISSION IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

There is evidence of God's mission in the Pentateuch. From the Greek word πέντα, meaning five, the Pentateuch refers to the first five books of the Bible, the books authored by Moses. The foundation of God's mission is laid in this beginning portion of the Bible in four ways: *First*, God predicted the coming of His Messiah to deal with sin. Moments after Adam's fall into sin God said,

“And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel,”

Genesis 3.15. Of course, this is a reference to the Lord Jesus Christ's defeat of Satan, which would be accomplished in fulfill-

ment of this prophecy on the cross of Calvary. *Second*, God provided for restored fellowship for individuals. It began with the skins God provided for Adam and Eve to wear to cover their nakedness.⁴ It continued with the ordinances and sacrifices to temporarily cover people's sins, and priestly service in the Tabernacle and later the Temple. It was culminated in the finished work of Jesus Christ, Second Corinthians 5:21:

“For he hath made him *to be* sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.”

Third, God promised universal blessing in the Abrahamic Covenant, which is the foundation upon which all subsequent covenants related to salvation are based. Restated in some places in the Pentateuch, here is a single verse from the first declaration of God's promise to Abraham, in Genesis 12:3:

“And I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee: and in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed.”

Fourth, God purposed to proclaim His name in all the earth. The God of the Bible is a missionary God. This is illustrated with the plagues sent to coerce the Egyptians to release the Israelites from bondage. Exodus 9:16 records the words God gave to Moses to speak to Pharaoh:

“And in very deed for this *cause* have I raised thee up, for to shew *in* thee my power; and that my name may be declared throughout all the earth.”

There is also evidence of God's mission in the Historical Books of the Bible. *First*, consider that God displayed His power to the surrounding nations through Israel. Do not think the Gentile nations were ignorant of the parting of the waters of the Red Sea, of the Shekinah glory, of Balaam's inability to curse the Israelites, of the manna from heaven God provided to feed His people, of their success in battle against their enemies, and of other events. Here are the words of Rahab to the Israelites sent to spy on the city of Jericho, in Joshua 2:9-11:

⁹ **And she said unto the men, I know that the LORD hath given you the land, and that your terror is fallen upon us, and**

turned to God from idols to serve the true and living God.¹¹ And they waited for God's Son to return from heaven, whom He raised from the dead, even Jesus Christ.¹²

Finally, evidence of God's mission is found in the Book of Revelation. The Gospels reveal Christ's mission (Mark 10:45) and our commission (Matthew 28:18-20). The Book of Acts records the beginnings of the earliest Churches' ministries. The epistles depict the development of those Churches. And in Revelation chapters two and three we find the testimony of seven Churches in the Roman province of Asia.

It is very clear that, despite the opinions of many commentators, Revelation chapters two and three contains, in a straightforward fashion, seven letters to the angels of seven Churches. Revelation 1:1, coupled with each of the letters in turn that are found in Revelation chapters two and three, show a communiqué from God the Father, to Jesus Christ, to an angel, to the Apostle John, to each of the angels of the Churches, for the benefit of the Churches. Illustrating this with Revelation 1:1 and Revelation 2:1, we read,

“The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave unto him, to shew unto his servants things which must shortly come to pass; and he sent and signified *it* by his angel unto his servant John ... Unto the angel of the church of Ephesus write....”

Thus, do the remaining six letters in Revelation chapters two and three begin. Do these seven congregations represent different stages of Church history? Nowhere in Scripture is there any evidence to support such a conclusion.

The seven letters comprise the reports of an audit conducted by the Lord Jesus Christ in which He evaluates the seven Church's progress in fulfilling their mission and thereby achieving God's mission through their efforts and ministries. Some of the Churches were found, by God's grace and through His Spirit, to be doing quite well. Other congregations were conducting themselves in a manner that can only be termed reprehensible. Thus, these seven Churches represented what was happening in the other Churches of that day, and what is happening in the Churches of our day, fulfilling God's mission, Christ's mission, and our commission.

The New Testament is a missionary book. The revelation about our Church's mission permeates its pages and clearly delineates the role we occupy with respect to Christ's mission and God's mission.

four Gospel accounts. In the Gospels, Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, we find evidence of three missions.

Prominent in the Gospels, of course, is the mission of the Son of God, the Lord Jesus Christ, to seek and to save that which is lost.⁶ Also seen in the Gospels is the mission our Lord gave to that institution He founded known as the Church of Jesus Christ, the Great Commission. However, it was in the fulfillment of Christ's mission and the declaration of our mission that we see God's mission advanced. The night before the climax of His redemptive mission to save us from our sins by dying a sacrificial death on the cross, the Lord Jesus spoke of our mission in connection with God's mission, in John 15.8. He said,

“Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit.”

Next, evidence of God's mission is found in the Book of Acts. Central to the theme of the Book of Acts is the utterance of Jesus Christ shortly before His ascension to His Father's right hand, in Acts 1.8:

“ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me....”

Throughout the Book of Acts, we see that witness occurring, first to the Jews (Acts 1.1-8.3), to the Jews and Gentiles and the racially mixed Samaritans (Acts 8.3-12.25), and then to the Gentiles (Acts 13.1-28.31). Those who responded to the witness were gathered, incorporated into churches via baptism, and then taught.

Third, evidence of God's mission is found in the Epistles. Epistles are letters written to Churches, Church leaders, and also members of Churches. In those Epistles, we learn that racial, ethnic and cultural divides have been broken down and that God has made of two one people in Christ.⁷ Throughout the epistles of the New Testament, only one Church was held up by the Apostle Paul as a model for other congregations, and therefore as a model for every Church to emulate, the Church in Thessalonica. First Thessalonians 1.7 reads,

“So that ye were ensamples to all that believe in Macedonia and Achaia.”

The word ensamples translates τύπος, a word that refers to them as examples to be followed.⁸ What kind of examples were they? From them sounded out the Word of the Lord in Macedonia and Achaia.⁹ Their faith to God-ward was spread abroad.¹⁰ They

that all the inhabitants of the land faint because of you.

¹⁰ **For we have heard how the LORD dried up the water of the Red sea for you, when ye came out of Egypt; and what ye did unto the two kings of the Amorites, that were on the other side Jordan, Sihon and Og, whom ye utterly destroyed.**

¹¹ **And as soon as we had heard *these things*, our hearts did melt, neither did there remain any more courage in any man, because of you: for the LORD your God, he is God in heaven above, and in earth beneath.**

Second, God preserved His people from destruction. On some occasions, He preserved His people using miracles, such as with the plagues in Egypt, the parting of the Red Sea, victory over the Amalekites in battle, and the collapse of the walls of Jericho. On other occasions, God worked providentially, such as with the young woman Esther, placed by God to be the Persian king's wife to save her people from annihilation. Mordecai asked his niece, in Esther 4.14,

“who knoweth whether thou art come to the kingdom for *such* a time as this?”

Third, God welcomed the worship of proselytes. Solomon mentioned them in First Kings 8.41-42:

⁴¹ **Moreover concerning a stranger, that is not of thy people Israel, but cometh out of a far country for thy name's sake;**

⁴² **(For they shall hear of thy great name, and of thy strong hand, and of thy stretched out arm;) when he shall come and pray toward this house.**

Of course, the Queen of Sheba and the Ethiopian eunuch come to mind as examples.

Then, there is evidence of God's mission in the Poetical Books. It can be understood, by now, that this brochure could be

developed into a book. Instead, let me state the matter briefly. Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and the Song of Solomon are books of poetry that comprise the wisdom literature of the Old Testament. Following are only three examples of God's mission found in this portion of the Bible: *First*, in the book of Job, the only Poetical Book written about a Gentile. In the midst of his terrible suffering, Job rejoiced in the hope of redemption and resurrection, in Job 19.25-26:

25 For I know that my redeemer liveth, and that he shall stand at the latter day upon the earth:

26 And though after my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God.

Next, in what are called the Messianic Psalms are found Jehovah's purpose to redeem with references to Messiah's First Coming. Psalm 22 describes the suffering Savior. Psalm 16.9-10 and Psalm 110.1 provide glimpses of the Messiah's resurrection and His reign after ascending to heaven. *Then*, in some different Psalms are found predictions that God's Son will rule the nations as King at the time of His Second Coming. Psalm 96.13 is one of the many passages, and reads,

“Before the LORD: for he cometh, for he cometh to judge the earth: he shall judge the world with righteousness, and the people with his truth.”

Fourth, and finally in the Old Testament, evidence of God's mission in the Prophetical Books. There is so much that could be addressed in the Prophetical Books. However, space constraints force me to limit my remarks to observations related to three men: *First*, there was Jonah, the well-known but reluctant missionary. He was sent to bring the Gentile city of Nineveh, the capital of the hated Assyrians, to repentance. However, he fled in the opposite direction and was swallowed by a great fish because he did not want to be any part of God showing Himself to be gracious. Jonah 4.2 records his reasoning:

“Therefore I fled before unto Tarshish: for I knew that thou art a gracious God, and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness....”

What does Jonah's life show us? Beside the great picture of Christ's resurrection that Jesus Himself referred to,⁵ we are shown in Jonah that God has an interest in the Gentiles, even Gentiles who are among the greatest enemies of His chosen people. *Next*, there was Daniel, who can be seen as a “tentmaker” missionary. Captured as a lad, he was incorporated into Babylon's magi and represented God well throughout the Babylonian captivity, speaking out for God to both the Babylonians and the Medo-Persians. Notice the words of one Babylonian king Daniel influenced, Nebuchadnezzar, in Daniel 4.34 and 37:

34 And at the end of the days I Nebuchadnezzar lifted up mine eyes unto heaven, and mine understanding returned unto me, and I blessed the most High, and I praised and honoured him that liveth for ever, whose dominion is an everlasting dominion, and his kingdom is from generation to generation:

37 Now I Nebuchadnezzar praise and extol and honour the King of heaven, all whose works are truth, and his ways judgment: and those that walk in pride he is able to abase.

Third, there was Isaiah, the prince of the prophets, who proclaimed a Messianic message for forty years. From his description of Christ as Jehovah's servant (Isaiah 42.1-7) to His description of Christ's substitutionary sacrifice in Isaiah chapter 53, Isaiah showed what the rest of the Old Testament reveals, God's universal concern and provision for *all* men.

Then, There Is GOD'S MISSION IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

If the Old Testament prepares the way for Messiah's coming, the New Testament presents the Messiah as He came to do the Father's will. Both testaments, then, join to reveal God's singular mission. The New Testament contains four kinds of books:

First, evidence of God's mission is found in the Gospels. The Gospels are unique in literature known to man. Nothing else available to mankind to read is of the genre that is found with the