

## WE ARE ALL TO BE MISSIONARIES

The very word “*evangelism*” can cause feelings of fear to rise in the hearts of some believers. For others, it stirs excitement. Whatever juices might be flowing when you hear the word, it is not a subject that disciples of Christ can responsibly ignore. After all Jesus makes it the focus of our mission. Pay attention to the following passages.

(Matthew 28:17-20) **“Then the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had told them to go. When the disciples saw Him, they worshiped Him; but some doubted. 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) **He 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 24:47) **“Repentance for the forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem.”** (Acts 1:7) **“But 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.”**

In each instance, *Jesus was speaking to His most committed followers* – and in 3 of the 4 passages – specifically to those that He had hand-picked to be His apostles. Though both Matthew and Mark stress the need to “go” - Matthew doesn’t emphasize the call to “preach” as Mark and Luke both do. His main focus is on “disciplining”- the teaching and training of followers. In the book of Acts, Luke speaks of how Jesus impressed upon them the need to be “witnesses” wherever they went.

**So is this mandate for missions for us?** I don’t want to bore you with semantics, but not everyone is called to preach (**κηρυξατε**) - which has to do with public proclamation – any more than everyone was called to be one of Jesus’ apostles. Neither is everyone called to be an evangelist (**ευαγγελιστας**) in the formal sense. That has to do with bringing or announcing good news. Paul tells us in Ephesians 4:11 that Christ gave some specific people these tasks – but not all. Yet, before you get too relaxed, the answer to whether we have all been commissioned is “yes” – but our specific responsibility depends a lot upon our unique gifts and callings. If we’re not called to be directly involved as evangelists, we are still directed to support those who are. How? Here are a few ways every believer is to support the furtherance of the gospel both near and far.

**Provide support.** Volunteer to assist whenever possible. (Ephesians 3:10; 4:14-16) The mission of the church is not the sole responsibility of the pastor. Paul says **“the manifold wisdom of God is to made known through the church”** and by the whole church **“as each member does their part.”** You may not be aware that October is “*Pastor Appreciation Month.*” Though I appreciate the cards and kind words that come my way this time of year, I am most encouraged by church members showing up at church functions - and especially when they roll up their sleeves to help for outreach events like our upcoming Block Party. I wouldn’t be doing what I do now if I’d not first tagged along with others who cared enough to get out of their comfort zones to share the love of Christ with others. In the process of helping others serve in ministry I was mentored and trained. It’s part of subjecting ourselves to discipleship. God got hold of my heart as I observed up close how others shared their faith in their daily lives. Don’t have a passion for missions? Get involved and see if God doesn’t light a fire within you.

**Be good witnesses for the defense of the gospel.** (Ephesians 5:15-16; Colossians 4:6; Titus 2:5-10) So many people have a bad taste in their mouth for the gospel because of how they perceive Christians. Either we don't practice what we preach or we major in minors – condemning sinners but doing little to nothing to lead them to Christ. Paul told believers in Ephesus to “**make the most of every opportunity**” in dealing with unbelievers. He told the Colossians that our words are to be “**seasoned with grace.**” But, he also told those in Crete that we have a responsibility to make sure no one can “**malign the word of God**” or “**say bad things about the church**” because of our behavior. We are to live in such a way as to “**make the word of God attractive.**” Though we should not be condemning people, neither should we be condoning their sinful behavior, let alone engaging in it ourselves. Such extremes taint and tarnish the beauty of the gospel.

**Pray for those on the front lines.** (Ephesians 6:18-19) Be they preachers, teachers, evangelists, or those who serve as ambassadors of Christ in relieving the needs of others, spend time every week petitioning God for them. Pray for their health and their strength. Pray for open doors for them to take Christ through. Pray for their discernment and wisdom. Pray for their confidence. Pray, pray, pray.

I've shared before how much it meant to receive word that folks back home were praying for us every day when Nina and I were sowing the seed of God's Word overseas. A 10-year old girl from Auburn Hills, Michigan wrote to tell me that when her parents led in bedtime prayers, we were always mentioned. Our dear Zetta (97) says she prays for me every day – as she also does for the missionaries Calvary Christian supports abroad. I don't take that lightly. Lead your family in praying for missions as you would in saying grace before a meal or you'd petition God for healing in sickness. Let them see that you care as much – and hopefully even more – about souls as you do your physical needs and comforts.

**Finance ministry as best you can.** (1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 9:7-14) Though Paul never demanded support, he made it clear that he was entitled to it, as well as anyone else who preaches the gospel. He uses the Biblical metaphor of muzzling an ox who treads the corn and cites the example of the support that those who ministered in the temple received. I have met those who object to “*paying preachers*” or “*supporting missionaries.*” They often insist that it's a waste of money and that salaried staff have displaced the need for lay ministry. My experience however is that most of those people do little to nothing to promote, let alone preach the gospel.

Like it or not, the amount of money someone will dedicate to missions often says a lot about the value they place upon saving souls. While hundreds of thousands of dollars are raised every year for building funds, most missions are fighting to stay afloat. And millions of people are dying without ever hearing about Christ. To borrow from a phrase that was popularized during the solicitation of war bonds around World War II: “*You say you really care about missions? Then, put your money where your mouth is.*”

Bottom line is that **Jesus commissions all of His followers** to spread the good news. None of us are exempt from doing our part to tell the world about God's love expressed in the sacrifice of His son. So, **Ready, Set, Go!**