

# Jesus' Mission Is My Mission

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There is no more basic place to begin a study of New Testament evangelism and our responsibility toward it than to understand the purpose of Jesus' first coming. To try to evangelize without this understanding, whatever our success might be, we will fall far short of what it could be if we knew why Jesus really came. The truth of the matter is that while one may know why Jesus came and may never try to teach or preach the Gospel to sinful men, those who do not understand his real mission among men will most certainly never attempt to spread the Gospel. Only as we understand fully the purpose and work of Christ, will we receive the proper motivation to consistently be soul conscious. To understand his mission requires an understanding of the factors behind his coming.

## The Reality of Sin and Its Consequences

Sin has ever been the factor that alienates men from God. The story of man's relationship with God began with perfect fellowship and accord. Such continued until Eve, then Adam, disobeyed God. Their sin severed the blissful fellowship they had enjoyed with their creator, and God could no longer tolerate them in the paradise of Eden (Gen. 3:24). From that day until the time of Noah, man continued to drive the wedge between himself and God ever deeper by his iniquities. He had reached a point where he was not worth redeeming because "... the wickedness of man was great..." and "...every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually" (Gen. 6:5). Had Noah not been a righteous man, the story of man would apparently have ended near its beginning because of sin. Isaiah described the sad condition of Israel seven centuries before Christ came:

Behold the Lord's hand is not shortened, that it cannot save: neither his ear heavy that it cannot hear; But your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid his face from you, that he will not hear. For your hands are defiled with blood, and your fingers with inquiry; your lips have spoken lies, your tongue hath muttered perverseness (Isa. 59:1-3).

What Isaiah said of Israel typifies man in general, "for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Rom. 3:23). The reason sin causes a separation between God and man is centered in the nature of God. He is pure and perfect in every way, and he cannot tolerate sin: "Thou art of purer eyes than to behold evil, and canst not look on iniquity" (Hab. 1:13). Neither can he allow it to go unpunished. Therefore, to be in fellowship with God, man must either live completely above sin (as God does) or find some means of cleansing for his sins.

From the record of man's first sin through the remainder of God's Word, His plan is unfolded whereby man may be forgiven of sin, may overcome its mastery, and may be reunited with him both in time and eternity. All of God's plans for reconciling man to himself are and ever have been centered in Christ. The first hint of this plan is found in God's curse upon the serpent in the Garden of Eden: "And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shall bruise his heel" (Gen. 3:15). God's promise to Abraham, "And in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed ..." (22:18), was more than merely a hint. By inspiration, Paul said this promise specifically referred to Christ as the seed of blessing for all (Gal. 3:16).

Isaiah spoke prophetically of the redemptive sin-cleansing work of Christ:

But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed .... And He bare the sin of many and made intercession for the transgressors (Isa. 53:5, 12).

He wrote in the prophetic past tense although it would be over seven centuries before Christ would come to fulfill these prophecies. However, by the Father's own perfect determination, "when the fullness of time came, God sent forth his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, that he might redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons" (Gal. 4:4-5).

When the Lord's angel told Joseph to unashamedly accept Mary's pregnancy, he said the babe's name would be "Jesus," "for it is He that shall save his people from their sins" (Mat. 1:21). When He had grown to manhood, His cousin, John, boldly identified Him as "the Lamb of God, that taketh away the sin of the world!" (John 1:29). We may fairly conclude that the very appearance of the Son of God on earth was predicated on the reality of sin in all men, its destructive consequences, and man's helplessness, left alone, to overcome it.

These awesome truths answer two classes of blasphemous babblers: First, those who deny the reality of sin and its consequences. Many are they who laugh at sin and think it great fun and sport to engage in it. Many others try to mitigate the awfulness of sin by calling various sins "diseases" or "social aberrations." The consequences of sin are often held up for ridicule. In the judgment of a terribly confused world, it is big fun to drink oneself into senselessness, destroy one's family by infidelity, cheat oneself into untrustworthiness and smoke oneself into cancer. Most of the world hardly seems to give the concept of the eternal consequences of sin even a passing thought anymore. However, the very fact of Christ's coming underscores the fact that sin is indeed "exceeding sinful" (Rom. 7:13). Likewise, Jesus' coming settles forever the fact that sin has eternal, as well as temporal, consequences.

Second are those who carelessly say they don't know why God sent his Son to die, and that perhaps the problem of sin could have been solved some other way if God had so chosen. Such make the death of Christ no better than an act of Divine sadism in which Jesus was crucified unnecessarily. There was no other way for sin and Satan's mastery to be vanquished. Had there been another way one does not merely suppose that the Father would have used it—he most certainly would have, as the Lord's agonized Gethsemane prayer testifies (Mat. 26:36-44).

### **Jesus' Mission is Related Directly to Redemption from Sin**

Despite the plainness of Bible teaching on the singularity of Jesus' mission among men it continues to be greatly misunderstood. Some have depicted Him as a political revolutionary. This folly was popularized during the turmoil of the 1960's on the college campuses. Some of the radical student agitators claimed that he would sanction their radical mayhem were he present. Such could hardly be further from the truth. Rather, he taught "... render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and unto God the things that are God's" (Luke 20:25).

Others have read how the Lord fed the hungry multitudes and have labeled His mission as one of social reform. These "bleeding heart" social planners (who are far more humanistic than humanitarian) want to **force** the rich to give to the poor, force the hard worker to give to the shiftless, force the moral to support the immoral, and enforce guaranteed housing and income for all. Some of these would even try to claim Jesus as their leader and hero. However, those whose stomachs He filled with bread and fish, He did not seek to follow Him "... for the food which perishes, but for the food which abideth into eternal life, which the Son of man shall give unto you" (John 6:27). He knew that there would never be financial equality among men, thus he said, "For ye have the poor always with you" (Mark 14:7). No, he did not come to destroy the slums and obliterate poverty, as badly as the "social gospel" advocates would desire to have it so!

Some see Jesus' compassionate work of healing the sick, the maimed, the demon-possessed and even raising the dead, and conclude that this was his principal mission. This is really but another plank in the "social gospel" platform, relating only to man's earthly sojourn. While He most surely had compassion on individuals and multitudes, His healing of their physical maladies was truly but a means to a far greater end when properly understood. The real purpose of Jesus' miracles is graphically demonstrated in the case of the palsied man who was brought to Jesus in Capernaum (Mark 2:1-12). Because the crowds prevented their

approaching Jesus through the door, His friends made a hole in the roof and lowered the man into His presence. To the astonishment of the bystanders, His first words to the man were not "Arise, and take up thy bed, and walk." Rather, He said, "Son, thy sins are forgiven" (v. 5).

Perceiving the evil thinking of the scribes, the Lord asked:

Which is easier, to say to the sick of the palsy. Thy sins are forgiven; or to say. Arise, and take up thy bed, and walk? But that ye may know that the Son of man hath authority on earth to forgive sins (he saith to the sick of the palsy), I say unto thee, Arise, take up thy bed, and go unto thy house (vv. 9-11).

The purpose of the physical healing was to prove Christ's power to accomplish spiritual healing – the real purpose of His coming.

To the Jews in Jerusalem, Jesus declared: "For the works which the Father hath given me to accomplish, the very works that I do, bear witness of me, that the Father hath sent me" (John 5:36). As John summarized the work of Christ and commented on the signs and miracles He wrought, the apostle wrote: "Many other signs therefore did Jesus in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book: but these are written, that ye may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye may have life in his name" (John 20:30-31). The purpose for which John wrote the record of many of the Lord's miracles was the same purpose for which Jesus performed those miracles. To say that Jesus' main mission on the earth was to heal the sick is no more logical than saying that His mission was to turn water into wine, or to control the weather on the Sea of Galilee.

All the miracles of Jesus were designed to prove His power, authority, and Sonship of God, all of which qualified Him for his real work and proved to the discerning that He was thus qualified. Peter used His miracles as such proof on Pentecost: "Jesus of Nazareth, a man approved of God unto you by mighty works and wonders and signs which God did by him in the midst of you, even as ye yourselves know" (Acts 2:2). No, the healing Jesus did was not primarily to mend diseased and crippled bodies, but to provide testimony that He was Who He claimed to be.

Never did any man live who had a clearer grasp of His purpose and mission. Consider the following statements He made which so indicate: "For the Son of man also came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many" (Mark 10:45); "For the Son of man came to seek and to save that which was lost" (Luke 19:10). As He instituted His memorial Supper, He said, "For this is My blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many unto remission of sins" (Mat. 26:28).

Let men falsely and foolishly claim secondary or unrelated purposes for His coming. We can only honor His own stated purpose: to be the Savior of sinful man by offering His own blood as the sin-cleansing fountain. Hebrews 9:26 captures Jesus' mission precisely: "But now once at the end of the ages [He] hath been manifested to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself."

### **His Mission Must Be My Mission**

There are several compelling reasons why Jesus' mission of saving the lost must be my mission:

- **First**, because my goal must be to become like Christ by following Him. Jesus said, "If any man would come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me" (Luke 9:23). A "disciple" in the fullest sense is not merely a student or a learner, but a practitioner of what he learns. Where the Master leads, we must follow. Paul urged us to adopt the mind and attitude of Christ (Phi. 2:5). When we do so, we will become more and more like Him, so that with Paul we can eventually say, "... it is no longer I that live, but Christ liveth in me ..." (Gal. 2:20). We are to so follow Christ that He will be "formed" in us (4:19). If we follow Christ faithfully so that we think as He thinks and He lives in us and is formed in us, we will necessarily make His work our work.
- **Second**, because the example of the early saints shows that they understood this to be their purpose. The apostles received orders directly from the Lord to make preaching, teaching, and soul-saving their primary responsibility. A part of the commission was to teach others all things that the Lord had commanded them (Mat. 28:20). This included the responsibility of preaching the Gospel and saving the sinner. As the apostles began fulfilling the commission, it becomes obvious that they did teach their converts to teach others. Therefore, when the great dispersion arose because of persecution in Jerusalem, those who were "scattered abroad went about preaching the word" (Acts 8:4). The implication is strong that they had already been doing this in Jerusalem.

Paul then bursts upon the scene like a long-burning spiritual meteor and makes his evangelistic thrusts into the heart of Asia Minor, Eastern Europe, and even all the way to Rome. Like Paul, many others felt themselves debtors to all men to preach the saving Gospel (Rom. 1:14-16). To him it was not an option, but a necessity (1 Cor. 9:16). Surely, those who lived close to the Lord, whether in time or proximity, understood evangelism to be their primary concern. Likewise, we so understand it.

- **Third**, because of the way people were converted in the first century. Several cases of conversion involve the saint and the sinner's being brought together by miraculous means (the crowd on Pentecost, Philip and the Ethiopian, Ananias and Saul, Peter and Cornelius, Paul, and the Philippian, et al.). However, in no case was the Gospel ever communicated to a sinner by an angel, by the Holy Spirit, by the Lord or by any other heavenly messenger. Although many first century preachers possessed miraculous powers, no sinner was ever saved by miraculous means, but always by Gospel power (Rom. 1:16). While heavenly

messengers did bring saint and sinner together, the human messenger was always the one who was left to communicate the saving Gospel to the sinner. If this was so during the days of miraculous activity, how much more it is so now. It was not to angels that the great commission was given, but to men. It has ever been so that the treasure of the Gospel is in "earthen vessels" (2 Cor. 4:7). There will be no Gospel preached, no sinners reproved, no salvation offered, no souls saved if we fail to make the Lord's mission our mission.

- **Fourth**, because we are the Lord's church, His spiritual body (Eph. 1:22-23). It will surely not be argued by any knowledgeable person that the mission of the spiritual body of Christ, the church of Christ, should, or can be, different from Jesus' mission in his physical body. While most indeed would not argue such verbally, it seems that many brethren are strongly arguing such practically. There is a new virus infecting the Lord's spiritual body, which they've caught from the denominations. It is called "provide all things for all men" (not to be confused with Paul's stated purpose to "become all things to all men" personally, in matters of judgment [1 Cor.9:22]). Some call it "ministering to the whole man." By this approach to the work of the church almost anything that men might enjoy and/or find useful is justified.

### **Misdirected Missions**

My first work out of college was as associate preacher with a large church in a medium-size Texas city in 1959. There was a Methodist Church in that city with a gymnasium in its basement. I believe you could have tortured the elders of the church I worked with, and they would not have built such a building. They knew there was no excuse for such a use of the Lord's money. Now, sad to say, that same congregation has built its own gymnasium. Oh, like brethren in other places who build such buildings, they call it their "Family Life Center" (which is supposed to make it less objectionable to the "moss-backs" in the church, if not less unscriptural). However, when I enter a building with basketball goals, net poles for volleyball and lines on the floor to mark off boundaries, somehow, I'm sorely tempted to call it a "gymnasium."

Once one starts down the "minister-to-the-whole-man" road it's difficult to find the place to stop. Some of the gymnasiums being built have a jogging track, I'm told. Why not put in a couple of lanes for bowling and a weight room, while we're at it? The newspapers have carried a story of an East Texas Baptist Church that has all the above, plus a swimming pool. They provoked the ire of the local health clubs, however, when said church hired the aerobic dancing instructor away from one of the clubs. One of our congregations was planning to put a restaurant in their gymnasium on the grounds that members of the church could bring their non-member friends there for lunch and teach them the Gospel. Whether they actually included the restaurant I don't know. There is just as much scriptural authority for a church operating a

swimming pool or a restaurant as there is for building a gymnasium in the first place. That authority is found in the verse just before the one giving a church authority for a piano or organ in worship and right after the verse that authorizes infant baptism. In my experience, the brethren who are loco over gymnasia are not very tolerant of those who mention the necessity of Scriptural authority, however.

Another symptom of this viral disease is the endless pleasure jaunts of various senior citizen groups and teenager groups in the church. I'm in favor of having a good time and seeing pretty scenery as much as the next fellow. I think it's wonderful if a group of Christians want to plan and pay for from their own funds such outings for themselves or their young people. I have never quite figured how it is the work or responsibility of the church of the Lord to hire someone who does little more than plan such recreational jaunts, often on a bus owned, operated, and fueled by the church.

The churches that are growing in numbers are the ones who are providing such things, without a doubt. But that is totally beside the point. The Catholics make the same argument with about as much merit for their bingo games and beer busts. Not only is there no direct reference to such in the New Testament as part of the work of the church, but there is also not even a tiny hint of such. Can you even imagine the Lord's planning a three-day sightseeing trip to Tyre and Sidon for the "39ers" or the "Autumn Leaves" group? How about picturing Timothy planning a "ski retreat" on Mt. Olympus for the young "Keen Teens" of Ephesus? Can you see Paul taking a second special contribution from the Gentile churches to build a "Family Life Center" for the "mother church" in Jerusalem? Such suggestions are at least ludicrous, if not blasphemous.

Where brethren ever got the idea that the church has the responsibility to meet all the "felt needs" of everybody is beyond me. I know where they did not get the idea, however. The nature of the church is spiritual – it is not a material, earthly, physical, political institution (John 18:36). Its work and mission are tied innately to its nature. It has the spiritual mission and work of preaching the saving Gospel and saving the souls of men by so doing. The Gospel is fully capable of doing just that without any help from our expensive and sensual gimmicks – **if we will just preach it**. Just as every work the Lord did was secondary to the saving of souls, so is every other responsibility of his spiritual body, including benevolence and self-edification. When we desert the primary work of the church, we thereby inevitably prostitute its very cause for existence. What will brethren say who have spent huge amounts of the Lord's money on

their buildings to provide all the combined services of the YMCA and country club and sinners point to them at the judgment and say, "Why didn't you spend that money to preach the Gospel which I never heard?"

### **Conclusion**

To whom does this principle, *Jesus' mission is my mission*, apply? Not merely to preachers, elders, deacons, and teachers, but to every Christian. To be sure, some will excel in one way or another. Some can preach to a crowd. Some could not do so at all but can teach one or two at a time. Some are gifted writers. Some in the kingdom are masters at using filmstrips, tracts, or correspondence courses. Some can use all these effectively; but what we must see is that all of us must find some means to spread the word of God. This is the work of the church, and we are the church!

Just how serious should we be about soul-winning? How serious was Jesus? He gave up heaven and lived with hardly a comfort on earth. But to really see what He thought of sin and the responsibility of rescuing souls from its slavery and damnation, gather with me in your mind at the foot of a cross on a craggy hill outside the walls of Jerusalem 20 centuries ago and see how serious He was about it. I repeat: the church has not two or three works to accomplish, but one great work which all other purposes must serve – to reach out with the saving Gospel in every expedient that is Scriptural and snatch souls from the clutches of error and sin which will send them to the certain fires of hell. If I am a member of the church, this must be my unquenchable thirst, my insatiable hunger, to teach and win as many souls as I possibly can. After all, this is that for which my Lord lived and died.

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