

## Going vs. Gathering By Bob Young

Rob Campbell caught my attention in an article entitled, "Scatter." Beginning in Genesis 1, Campbell challenged me to rethink and re-envision God's plan for blessing his creation. "God blessed them and said to them, 'Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it'" (Gen. 1:28). Considering the repeated emphasis in the early chapters of Genesis on God's desire to bless, God is in essence saying, "Take my blessings and propagate them everywhere."

The battle between good and evil has been waged throughout human history. When the first human beings disobeyed the instructions given by God, he sent them forth from Eden to scatter his blessings into the world. When God's blessings failed to overcome evil, God focused his renewal efforts in Noah, after the flood sending Noah and his family into a fresh renewed world to scatter and propagate God's blessings. Soon, the tendency of the people to gather rather than scatter is seen in the Tower of Babel, so that God again scattered the human race. Then God focused his re-creation-restoration-rescue project in Abraham and his descendants, promising that his blessings would go forth into the entire world through the seed of Abraham. As part of God's project, Israel was given the task of taking God's glory and blessings to the nations. But rather than going forth as light and hope to the nations, Israel withdrew and isolated itself.

What is the purpose of this brief history lesson? Despite God's desire to send forth his people into his world to share his re-creation blessing everywhere, God's people have tended to turn away from God's plan and focus internally on their own desires. **The history of the people God has chosen to use to spread his blessings into the world is that they have chosen gathering rather than going.**

Fast forward with me to the New Testament. God's plan to bless the world through the seed of Abraham continues, fulfilled in the coming of Jesus (Gal. 3:16). God's plan is unchanged. God's plan is that his people should go forth to propagate God's blessings everywhere. This desire is reflected in Jesus' final words before his ascension, "Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely, I am with you always, to the end of the age" (Matt. 28:19-20). Jesus sent forth his followers into the world to propagate God's blessings!

Leonard Sweet has written, "The church is trying to get out of what God is trying to get into -- the world. We have churches full of people who love Jesus, but who don't love what Jesus loves." The church is focused on gathering while Jesus' final instructions are focused on going. The church talks about loving one another and struggles to love the world that Jesus loved; the church has largely failed to share God's blessing in Christ. The church defines itself and determines who is faithful based on gathering rather than going. Where is the church that keeps track of going – the number of spiritual conversations during a week, the number of evangelistic Bible studies set up or taught, the number of unbelievers contacted or invited? Where is the church that is measuring going as much as gathering?

The church has not been called to gather but to go. The church is an assembly or gathering from which God's people go forth **into the world** with renewed hope and power. Do not be self-deceived. Some churches send large numbers who "go" but they basically "go" to "gather" with believers in another place. Realistically, few are "going" into the world in the God-given power of the gospel of Jesus. The power that energizes the going and the gospel is God himself; we go forth as those upon whom his Spirit rests – the people of God, for the purpose of propagating God's salvation blessing into all the world.

Quoting Campbell, "The church is not a place you go to but a place you go from." May that simple biblical truth redefine how we see church and how we see the purpose of our assembling! God calls us to go!