

Why do we do missions?

Edited and posted by Bob Young

In his *How Can I Support International Missions?* Mark Collins challenges us to think carefully about the biblical foundations of mission work. Under the title, “Why do we do missions?” Crossway recently posted some thoughts adapted from Collins.

Many Bible passages speak to the need for God’s people to proclaim God. Two Old Testament passages that immediately come to mind are the book of Jonah and Isaiah 42—Israel was called to be a light to the nations. In the New Testament, the call to proclaim God is not always immediately visible, although some passages are unmistakably clear.

Think with me! A disciple is like the master. When we say that we are disciples of Jesus, we mean that we are his followers. We recognize him as our teacher, our example, and our Lord. We watch his life, we learn his teachings, we follow his example and live out his teachings, we share his teachings. The master models his mission by what he says, what he teaches, and what he does. When the master sends his disciples out on his mission, the disciples accept that mission as their own.

The New Testament can be misunderstood only with effort. Christ commissioned his disciples to take the gospel to the world. We have Jesus’ instructions recorded, we can read about the activities of the first disciples, we can read reports of the results of their work.

Jesus sent forth his followers to take the gospel to the ends of the earth. Some passages that speak directly about the purpose and plan of Jesus are Matt. 28:18-20, Acts 1:8, and Col. 1:5, 23. And there are many more. Jesus sent forth his followers as the Father had sent him (John 20:21; 17:18). After his resurrection, before his ascension, Jesus could have spoken to his followers about many things, but the message that is front and center is that they should take the gospel message to the multitudes and masses, into all the world.

An important and often overlooked point in the last chapters of the Gospels and the first chapters of Acts is that actions are based on identity. Disciples of Jesus, because of their identity as disciples, act as Jesus acted. The disciple is sent by Jesus just as the Father sent Jesus. Mission arises from identity.

If you are Christian, your identity depends on Jesus—his nature, his purpose, his actions, the reason for his coming. It is enough for the disciples to be like their master. We are called to become like Jesus, to live and share his teachings, to make his purpose our purpose.

We must not miss the fact that our mission is defined by our Master. His mission is our mission. His reason for coming to the earth is our reason for being on this earth.

The contemporary church struggles with the temptation to substitute the “how” of the mission for the “what” of the mission. That is, many believe that if we go forth in the compassion of Jesus (the “how”), we are relieved of the task to proclaim boldly the message of salvation (the “what” of Jesus’ mission). Nothing could be further from the truth!

Here’s what you need to realize! Throughout the Gospels, Jesus always calls those who would follow him to get out of the boat, to get out of their comfort zone, to go beyond what they can see. He constantly gives them more than they bargain for. He stretches their understanding and their commitment.

When Jesus gives his disciples the instructions that we call the Great Commission, both Matthew and Mark record that some of the disciples were doubting, struggling with faith, fearful, uncertain. Does Jesus spend time dealing with their doubts? No, he sends out folks who are struggling, giving them the assurance that he will go with them and always be with them. His power, his authority, his message, his glory will be enough. Jesus clearly speaks to what they are to do, where they are to do it, and how they are to do it.

What to do—how to do it. Make disciples. This is the main verb. The participial verbs describe how to accomplish the task. Make disciples by baptizing them and teaching them.

Where to do it. Everywhere you are going, to the ends of the earth, to all the nations, all the ethnic groups of the world. God wants to bless all families and nations of the earth. The kingdom is to be extended to include every people group—every tribe, tongue and nation.

Three observations.

First, disciples of Jesus are called to share the Good News of Jesus everywhere. As the message is preached and believed, the disciples are to baptize new believers and then continue to teach them the ways and teachings of Jesus. This brief description encompasses the what, the how, and the where.

Second, the last few verses of Matthew say that disciples go forth to accomplish Jesus' purpose with his power and presence just as he has promised. His promise is spiritual nourishment as we seek strength to faithfully obey the Great Commission. The promise of Jesus' power and presence is clearly tied to disciple-making.

Third, the modern church has too often mis-defined the mission of Jesus. Jesus defines the what, the how, and the where. What if missionaries are sent forth and the goals and the results do not match Jesus' purpose? What can we say? What should we do? Yes, we are technically correct when we observe that "mission" means "being sent" so that everyone sent is a missionary. But not all of those being sent are advancing Jesus' mission. They may be our missionaries, but they are not Jesus' missionaries! How sad!

The mission is Jesus' mission. Are we doing what we want to do or what Jesus wants done? Are we satisfying self or our Master? If our mission works are not fulfilling Jesus' mission, why do we do mission work?