

March 10, 2013

The Growth of Community: *Mission*

Matthew 28:16 – 20

God Himself, in the Trinity, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, exists in perfect community. And God created us to enter into the enjoyment of that community with Him, as His image bearers to reflect who He is through right community with each other. God created us for community, and yet because of sin, all of us have this tendency toward isolation and hiding. Sin hijacks the purpose of God and creates brokenness in community. Brokenness between man and God; brokenness between man and man. But on the cross, Jesus, in His body took our isolation and brokenness upon Himself. Jesus bore the rejection of men, absorbed the wrath of God, that men might be reconciled to God and to each other. That community might be restored. Through the cross God's work is to restore community. To create a people redeemed for His glory. In doing this God has repaired this broken image of who He is. We are restored in our relationship with Him, and with each other. We are restored to live life in community together with others who have experienced this same redemption. And all of this is so that we might reflect the perfect community of the Triune God to the world around us, and draw others into this community.

Peter puts it like this in his first letter: *But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for His own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light.* 1 Peter 2:9 We have been brought into community with God and with one another – **so that** we would spend our lives telling others about this marvelous grace. If you have been saved, you have no other mission in life. God called us into this community and intends that through our proclamation of the gospel it would grow. If you go back to the beginning – go back to Genesis – the mandate God gave to man on the day he was created was **'Be fruitful, and multiply and fill the earth'**. When sin had so filled the earth that God started over with righteous Noah, He didn't change His intent. He told Noah the same thing He told Adam – **'Be fruitful, and multiply and fill the earth'**.

And along comes the Son of God, crucified, buried, resurrected – and tells His disciples essentially the same thing: **Go therefore and make disciples of all nations.** In other words, **be fruitful, multiply and fill the earth!** God has not changed in His desire to see, as the prophet Isaiah puts it: *"That men may know from the rising to the setting of the sun that there is no one besides Me. I am the LORD, and there is no other"* Isaiah 45:6 The psalmist echos this great purpose of God: *"All the ends of the earth will remember and turn to the LORD, and all the families of the nations will worship before You."* Psalm 22:27 And Habbakuk restates it like this: *"For the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the LORD, as the waters cover the sea."* Habbakuk 2:14 And Zechariah says: *"And the LORD will be king over all the earth; in that day the LORD will be the only one, and His name the only one."* Zechariah 14:9

Scripture makes it clear that God's desire is that the whole earth would be filled with His glory. And Scripture also tells us that the way that happens is through the growth of the community of the redeemed. The more people that are brought into this community, the more His glory shines and fills the earth. The proclamation of the gospel, is God's appointed means to fulfill His purpose in the earth. **Mission exist precisely because the worship of God does not.** You have not been saved and brought into the community of the redeemed to hide there until you go to heaven. Several years ago, Dr. James Stewart, professor of New Testament at the University of Edinburgh, was asked what he thought was the greatest threat to the modern church. The questioner wanted to know whether it was communism, atheism, or materialism. He said, **"It is not communism, atheism, or materialism; the greatest threat to the church is Christians trying to sneak into heaven incognito without ever sharing their faith."**

After His resurrection, Jesus meets His disciples on a mountain and gives them the scope of mission for every believer: *And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore 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 observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age."* Matthew 28:18 – 20 And this has never changed in 2,000 years. Go – make disciples – baptize them and teach them. That's it. That is what we are charged with as the community of the redeemed. I'll never forget the answer of one man who was interviewing for a job as a high-powered executive with a Fortune 500 company, when he was asked, 'What is your purpose in life?' And without missing a beat he answered, 'To go to heaven and take as many with me as possible'. He understood the centrality of the gospel and the scope of his mission in life. **Be fruitful, multiply and fill the earth.**

I don't think most people who call themselves Christians understand their mission. I don't think many of them see that their purpose in life is to call as many as possible into the community of the redeemed. R.A. Torrey once said: ***'I would like to ask what right a man has to call himself a follower of Jesus Christ if he is not a soul-winner? There is absolutely no such thing as following Christ unless you make the purpose of Christ's life the purpose of your life'***. Evangelism is not something that requires any kind of special gifting, although I have heard plenty of people excuse their lack of proclaiming the gospel on the fact that they just don't have the gift of evangelism. There is no gift of evangelism – there are given to the church as gifts people Paul calls evangelists. But you cannot excuse your disobedience to the command of Jesus to go and make disciples on the lack of a gift the Bible doesn't even mention.

Evangelism for the believer is not an option – it is an obligation. It is not a choice to be considered – it is a command to be obeyed. It is not a gift – it is a responsibility. In fact, one of the clearest indications that a person is truly a follower of Christ is that he or she is calling people to Christ through the gospel. Charles Spurgeon put it like this: ***"Have you no wish for others to be saved? Then you are not saved yourself. Be sure of that.... The saving of souls, if a man has once gained love to perishing sinners and his blessed Master, will be... an all-absorbing passion to him. It will so carry him away, that he will almost forget himself in the saving of others..... If sinners will be damned, at least let them leap to hell over our bodies. And if they will perish, let them perish with our arms about their knees, imploring them to stay. If hell must be filled, at least let it be filled in the teeth of our exertions and let not one go there unwarned and unprayed for."*** Charles Spurgeon

The fact of the matter is that ***every follower of Christ this side of heaven should be actively concerned for every lost person this side of hell***. When Jesus called His disciples, one of the first things He told them was ***'Follow Me and I will make you fishers of men'***. Mark 1:6 This is not a singular call to some first century fishermen. This is the call to every person who would follow Christ. Darrell W. Robinson, in a book called, *People Sharing Jesus*, makes the argument that ***'If you're not fishing, you're not following'***. The essence of following is fishing. The essence of discipleship is making more disciples. The growth of community, the spread of the knowledge of God in the earth is dependent upon the people of God taking up the responsibility of proclaiming the Good News to every person.

How urgent is this call? Let's put it in perspective. There are 138,000 more lost people in the world today than there were yesterday. If all the lost people were lined up thirty inches apart, they would encircle the globe, not once or twice but thirty times – and the line is growing twenty-five miles each day. Dr. James Kennedy noted that if an evangelist with an international reputation could win one thousand souls to Christ every night of the year, it would take him ten thousand years to win the entire world to Christ. But if one real disciple of Christ were able by the grace of God to win just one soul to Christ each year, and disciple that person, and then he would go out and win and disciple one other person each year, and so on – it would take thirty-two years to win the entire world to Christ. Notwithstanding the fact that Scripture makes it clear that not all will be won. Still the point is made.

In Luke 19 the evangelist records that Jesus defined His mission this way, ***"For the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost."*** Luke 19:10 Jesus came to seek and save the lost. That was the essence of His mission. And numerous times in the gospel Jesus tells His disciples that it was the Father who sent Him on this mission to seek and save the lost. So when He tells His disciples in John 20:21: ***'...as the Father has sent Me, I also send you.'*** they would have understood that this then was their primary mission as followers of Christ. And in the first chapter of Acts, Jesus reiterates the mission command: ***'But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be My witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.'***

This is the mission of the church. This is why we have been called into community. The church, you and I, are sent into the world to follow in the footsteps of our Master – not to seek and to **save** the lost – only Christ can save them. ***But to seek and witness to the lost so that He might save them***. Just as Jesus told those early followers – ***You will be My witnesses*** – He is telling us that ***we are sent into the world to witness to Jesus by proclaiming the gospel and making disciples of all nations***. Charles Spurgeon had a word for his congregation in his day – and I think it still speaks to us in our day: ***"If you are yourself saved, the work is but half done until you are employed to bring others to Christ. You are as yet but half formed in the image of your Lord. You have not attained to the full development of the Christ-life in you unless you have commenced in some feeble way to tell others of the grace of God; and I trust that you will find no rest to the sole of your foot till you have been the means of leading many to that blessed Saviour who is your confidence and your hope."***

A story from The Voice of the Martyrs, tells of four young men who chose pseudonyms – Pencil, Eraser, Pen and Paper Clip – while training for a Christian mission expedition into North Korea. They were trained by "Andrew," a Christian worker in China, for the work that would face them after crossing the Tumen River into North Korea. While three were studious in their work, the VOM report said, the young man who chose the name "Pencil" seemed to pay little attention, but all four were dispatched into the kingdom of Kim Jong-il a short time later.

Reports from within North Korea several months later came to VOM that three – Eraser, Pen and Paper Clip – had been arrested by North Korean police and beaten, thrown into vehicles and taken away. Reports came back the three were in a concentration camp, but "Pencil," who had watched the arrests, never saw them again. "Pencil," who feared a similar arrest, lived as a beggar to avoid detection, then returned to Andrew in China. "With tears in his eyes, 'Pencil' told Andrew the fate of his three friends. He shared how they had been bold witnesses for Christ, and how he had hid in fear as his best friends were taken away," the report said. "What do you want to do with the rest of your life?" Andrew asked, and "Pencil" told him, "I want to learn how to be brave like my friends, and unafraid to share Jesus."

"The boy whose mind always seemed to wander was now a young man completely committed to Christ," the VOM report said. "When 'Pencil' was ready to return to North Korea, he looked into the eyes of his friend and mentor, and said, 'I need nothing more.'" He immediately connected with a Christian couple inside North Korea, and together they worked on their ministry. For five months, they planted seeds of faith and prayed, VOM said. "One day the three of them were sharing with a small group of beggars and gave them some tracts and a Bible. One of the young beggars went home and proudly showed the Bible to his mother," VOM's report, written by P. Todd Nettleton, said. The mother promptly grabbed it and marched into a police station, where commanders dispatched officers to arrest the couple and "Pencil." His following interrogation quickly turned to torture, VOM said, as officers demanded to know the source of the Bible, and that "Pencil" recanted.

Instead, he told them of his friends and their fearless witness. "There was a time when I couldn't be like them," he said. "I was too afraid. But now I can be since Jesus is with me." Beatings and torture, including pulling out his fingernails, followed. "If you kill me, someday you will become a Christian," "Pencil" told the officers. Eventually, the officers gave up, ordering him to a labor camp but with instructions that he not be fed. For two months, "Pencil" told the other prisoners and the camp guards, "Jesus is the reason I am able to go on." "Because of his endurance and how he shared the love of Jesus, many in the camp turned to Christ," the VOM report said. "After two months in the camp, Pencil died. He never saw his 20th birthday. His body was removed from the camp, but the fruit of his short ministry there lived on."

Kevin DeYoung and Greg Gilbert recently wrote a book called ***What is the Mission of the Church?*** And the fact that someone thought it necessary to even write such a book should tell us how far we as the church of God have strayed from the original command – ***Go and make disciples***. No one had to write such a book for the early church. They had met the risen Christ – they couldn't help but proclaim Him. They overflowed with the gospel – it just bubbled out of them. You couldn't be around these guys without hearing the gospel. No one had to explain to Pencil, Eraser, Pen and Paper Clip that their mission was to proclaim the gospel and ignite the worship of God in hearts that did not know Him. In 1928 the International Missionary Conference met in Jerusalem, and one of the statements that came from that conference bears repeating: ***"Herein lies the Christian motive: it is simple. We cannot bear to think of men living without Him. We believe in a Christlike world. We know nothing better; we can be content with nothing less."*** If you can think of men living without Christ – then I'm not sure you can call yourself a Christian.

Dr. Theodore Williams was the founder and first General Secretary of the Indian Evangelical Mission, who died in 2009. Trained as an economist, he set aside his ambitions for worldly success when he heard the voice of His Savior calling him into the ministry. Among the many Indian mission leaders he mentored and supported, he was affectionately known as *Annachi* (elder brother). Considering the hundreds of millions of his own people who were lost and without Christ in the world he said, ***"We face a humanity that is too precious to neglect. We know a remedy for the ills of the world too wonderful to withhold. We have a Christ too glorious to hide. We have an adventure that is too thrilling to miss."***

And we who believe, have a gospel that is too important to neglect – and too simple to forget. Listen to the words of the apostle Paul: *Now I would remind you, brothers, of the gospel I preached to you, which you received, in which you stand, and by which you are being saved, if you hold fast to the word I preached to you-- unless you believed in vain. For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that He was buried, that He was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures* 1 Corinthians 15:1 – 4 There it is, that's the gospel – **Christ died for our sins – He was buried in a tomb – and on the third day He rose** – having conquered sin, Satan and the tomb forever. What could be simpler?

It's like fishing – what could be simpler than a pole, a line, a hook and a worm? Do we understand that if you're not fishing, you're not following? Now you're not going to catch every fish in the stream – but how about one? How about just putting your hook in the water? How about just making one weak, little cast? C.T. Studd, missionary on three continents in the last century said: ***"I cannot tell you what joy it gave me to bring the first soul to the Lord Jesus Christ. I have tasted almost all the pleasures that this world can give. I do not suppose there is one that I have not experienced, but I can tell you that those pleasures were as nothing compared to the joy that the saving of that one soul gave me."*** C.T. Studd

Those who have insight will shine brightly like the brightness of the expanse of heaven, and those who lead the many to righteousness, like the stars forever and ever. Daniel 12:3

The fruit of the righteous is a tree of life, and he who is wise wins souls. Proverbs 11:30

If you do not know Christ this morning, this is a gospel call to begin following Jesus. He died on the cross for your sins against a Holy God so that you might be brought into the community of the redeemed and live no longer for yourself but for His glory. If you are a believer here this morning, this is a call to mission – to proclaim the excellencies of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light.

J. Wilber Chapman, evangelist and pastor of the last century, said this: "If to be a Christian is worthwhile, then the most ordinary interest in those with whom we come in contact would prompt us to speak to them of Christ. If the New Testament be true--and we know that it is--who has given us the right to place the responsibility for soul-winning on other shoulders than our own? If they who reject Christ are in danger, is it not strange that we, who are so sympathetic when the difficulties are physical or temporal, should apparently be so devoid of interest as to allow our friends and neighbors and kindred to come into our lives and pass out again without a word of invitation to accept Christ, to say nothing of sounding a note of warning because of their peril? If today is the day of salvation, if tomorrow may never come and if life is equally uncertain, how can we eat, drink and be merry when those who live with us, work with us, walk with us and love us are unprepared for eternity because they are unprepared for time? If Jesus called his disciples to be fishers of men, who gave us the right to be satisfied with making fishing tackle or pointing the way to the fishing banks instead of going ourselves to cast out the net until it be filled? If Jesus himself went seeking the lost, if Paul the Apostle was in agony because his kinsmen, according to the flesh, knew not Christ, why should we not consider it worthwhile to go out after the lost until they are found? If I am to stand at the judgment seat of Christ to render an account for the deeds done in the Body, what shall I say to him if my children are missing, if my friends are not saved or if my employer or employee should miss the way because I have been faithless? ***If I wish to be approved at the last, then let me remember that no intellectual superiority, no eloquence in preaching, no absorption in business, no shrinking temperament or no spirit of timidity can take the place of or be an excuse for my not making an honest, sincere, prayerful effort to win others to Christ.***"

Our good and faithful heavenly Father,

May we be a people who delight in You, revel in Your goodness, take joy in Your salvation, glory in the cross and make our souls happy in You. Thank You for Your Son who died that we might live, who was forsaken that we might be brought in. Thank You for the great promises and invitations of the gospel – pardon for rebels, liberty for captives, health for the sick and salvation for the lost. Thank You for granting us mercy to become Your people – Your own treasured possession. Help us to live the gospel, proclaim the gospel, walk in the joy of the gospel and live as those who have been made happy in God and do all we can to make others happy in You. Make us a holy community that so magnifies and glorifies God, that it causes the world to believe in His Son, and grant that we would delight in God through Jesus Christ spreading His joy through the gospel, we pray in the precious, life-giving, joy-filling, community-making name of Jesus Christ our Savior, Amen.