

“Principles that guide world Evangelization”

(The Gospel to all “ethnes” - peoples)

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Do you believe God is - that he exists? Most of you would say “yes”. Do you believe that because of sin the human race is separated from God, alienated from God and deserving of destruction? The Bible declares that to be true and again most of you would say “yes” I believe that.

Do you believe God chose to redeem, to save from destruction a people for himself? That is do you believe that right from the start God decided he wouldn't let the whole human race go the way it wanted to - away from him and to hell - but that he would intervene and save many of them? Again most would say “yes”.

Do you believe God intervened in history by coming to this earth in the person of his Son, Jesus, for the express purpose of accomplishing the salvation of his people - that is to save us? Isn't Jesus the one who said, “God did not send his son into the world to condemn the world but to save the world through him”? “Yes.”

Now this isn't a trick question but listen carefully: Do you believe Jesus finished the task of saving everyone he intended to save while he was still here on earth? Even though Jesus provided the basis for the salvation of his people, namely that he died for us, satisfying God's righteous anger against us - did he then actually save everyone who would be saved? I think most would say “Of course not”. Jesus did save some at that time but his intention was that many more would be saved in the years to come before he returns to earth.

In the first message in this eight part series on World evangelization, we looked carefully at the mandate - Jesus' commission of his people to be his witnesses to the ends of the earth. Earlier to his disciples he had said it this way, in those well known words we call the great commission: Go, therefore and make disciples of 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.” I would like you to imagine yourself as a first century disciple - a Christ-follower. I would like you to imagine you were there when Jesus gave that commission. Or better yet I want you to imagine you were standing there the day Jesus ascended into heaven several days after his resurrection.

Suppose you heard him say to you, “You will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.” Suppose that after he left

you looked at each other and said, "Wow, was he serious?" "Did he mean that it is our responsibility to let people everywhere know about him?" And then together you answer - "Yes he was serious and yes, and yes, he said it to us. And then you went back to town, sat down in the living room of one of your homes and you said, "O.K. so what do we do?" At that point one of you pipes up and says, I know what to do. We all join the rebel political party, overthrow the Romans and then take over country and make laws that proclaim Christianity the law of the land. Another jumps up and says "Yes, and we'll make any other religion illegal and severely punish any one who doesn't join the church and live like a Christian." But another one of the group speaks up and says, "I don't think that's the way to do it at all. I think we should just love people, help them and then tell them about Jesus.

"But what about the people in Samaria?" another says. "How do we get the message to them?" "Yes, and the ones in Rome and even Spain or even India?" adds another. "Wait a minute," says another, "We can't be worried about the Romans or the Indians - look at all the lost people there are right here in Jerusalem!"

At that one of the leaders intervened, "It seems to me that we are unclear about just what it is we are supposed to be doing and how we are to go about doing it. "I'd like us to back up for a minute and look carefully at what God has specifically asked us to do. "Let's see if there are any principles that will guide us in the way we carry out his command to be witnesses."

In the first message in this series I asked the question: Why world evangelization? We looked at two answers to the question (though there are more).
 1. Because if people do not know Jesus Christ they cannot know God. The Bible teaches that those who are not trusting in Jesus will spend eternity in the "lake of fire" separated from God.
 2. Because God has told us to tell the people of the world about Jesus. It was always God's intention that his people would tell those who don't know. We looked at God's command to Israel in the Old Testament and his command to the church in the New Testament. Now it is one thing to know that we have been charged with telling the world about Jesus - it is quite another thing to do it.

Where do we start? The task that Jesus gave is huge! Maybe like being handed a spoon and being told to empty out Chatfield Reservoir -You're tempted to say it can't be done. Many of us are tempted to say the task Jesus gave the church is so large we can't possibly accomplish it. We'll just do a little something so at least we can say we tried and hope that's good enough. But was Jesus serious when he looked at that small group of believers that day and said, "you will be my witnesses to the ends of the earth?" What is it exactly we are supposed to do and can it be done?

Please look with me in the Bible at Matthew 28:19-20. What does Jesus say he wants them to do? "Make disciples of all nations". Yes, he defines that disciple making process as baptizing and teaching and we will come back to that in a few

minutes but lets look at who the disciples are first of all -Where are these disciples to come from? From or “of all nations.” Does the Bible teach that every person on earth will eventually become a disciple of Jesus Christ? No. We know that many reject God and spend eternity separated from him. I am convinced Jesus did not send his followers on a mission that he knew was impossible - one that they could not accomplish! Thus it is fair to say that Jesus does not mean in Mt 28 that the task is to make every person on earth into a disciple. What does he mean then? Is this just a way of saying “witness to as many people as you can?” No. Jesus is not being imprecise with his language.

That word “nations” that Jesus uses is a word from which we get our word “Ethnic”. When we think of an “ethnic” group we think of a group of people who share a common ancestry or culture. Often times people with a common ancestry will in fact form nations - political areas made up largely of only those of their ancestral or cultural background. That’s what’s happening in Bosnia right now.

New political entities (nations we call them) are forming around ethnic groups. The Muslims contrasted with the Croats contrasted with the Serbs. Yes, sometimes ethnic groups, people groups will form into political nations. But other times people with a common ancestry will be part of a larger political area even though they have not adopted the culture of that area. Many American Indians are obviously part of the U.S. but have a different language and a different culture and in fact are part of a different people group. In fact have you heard of the Indians of our country being called by such names as the Sioux “nation” or the Arapaho “nation”, or the Cherokee “nation”? While in part they are referring to themselves politically as different from the U.S. more importantly they are referring to their distinction as a separate culture - a people group. That is what Jesus is referring to in Matthew 28:19-20 when he talks about making disciples “OF ALL NATIONS” that is “all people groups”. Again, is Jesus saying that our task is to make a disciple of every person everywhere? Or that our task is to make as many disciples as we can from where ever? No. His commission is specific - make disciples of all nations. God wants disciples from every people group on earth. And he has commissioned us to reach every people group on earth and make disciples of those God is calling to himself.

I want you to look in your Bible again but this time look at Genesis 12:1-2. We looked at this two weeks ago and noted that God’s intention was not just to save Abraham and his descendants but through Abraham to bless (what does it say at the end of verse 2?) “To bless all peoples on earth.” That word “peoples” is not singular, all “people” as in every person but all “peoples” (plural). That word is most other times translated “tribes” or as we would call them - “people groups”. In fact when that commission and promise are repeated in Genesis 18:18 and following the word used is translated the same way as Matthew 28:19-20 - “Ethne” or nation meaning people group. It is not that Abraham will be a blessing to every person who will ever live but that God’s people will be the means God will use to bring His blessing to every people group of the world.

Just to strengthen our understanding of what this word means do you remember

what God did just before his command and promise to Abraham in chapter 10? He listed the nations or people groups of the world. From the very beginning God's intention has been to call and make disciples out of every nation or people group in the world. The commission Jesus gave his disciples in Matthew 28 was not to evangelize as many people as possible but more specifically to make disciples out of every people group in the world.

To see that this is what the Bible is talking about look with me at Revelation 7:9. Jesus is seated on his throne at the end of the age and standing before his throne are who and from where? There was a great multitude from every "nation, tribe, people and language." From one end of this book to the other God makes it plain that he intends to call out men and women from every people group in the world. In fact turn to Matthew 24:14. Jesus is talking about the signs of the end of this age - when this life as we know it will be over and he will come again to usher in the age to come. What does he say will mark the end of this age? The "gospel of the Kingdom" will be preached in the world as a testimony to who? "All nations". There's that word again. And then the end will come. So when four chapters later Jesus gives his great commission to his followers what do you think he means when he says, "make disciples of all nations?"

When it comes to the task of World Evangelization it is not just a matter of evangelizing or witnessing to as many people as possible but it is more specifically and strategically making disciples in all the people groups of the world. - That is Jesus command to us.

I'd like you to see this practiced by the Apostle Paul.

Look please at Romans 15:19b READ (from Jerusalem through Turkey and Greece) Now read 15:23. "Now that there is no more place for me to work in these regions..." How could Paul say this? Has Paul preached or witnessed to every person in those countries?

Has he made a disciple of every person? What then had he completed? He had brought the gospel to that people group. He had established the church in those people groups. Notice where he wants to go next? Rome and Spain. Why? To complete the mission Jesus has given the church. "To make disciples of all nations-people groups". Since that is true it has implications for our missions strategy. To be faithful to the commission God has given us it is not enough for us to evangelize only among Americans. We have a responsibility to every people group of the world. We may not be able to accomplish it alone but we nonetheless bear the responsibility with others to see to it get done. Therefore we will send missionaries, we will support missionaries with our prayer and our money and our care - because they are an extension of us - our means of responding to the commission Jesus has given us to make disciples of all people groups.

Would you please look with me again at Matthew 28:19-20. But I want you to

see something else about this task Jesus has given us in this text and elsewhere.

Something else that impacts our missions strategy. Something that helps us know what to do that is most obedient to Jesus' command. What is it we are to do in all the nations, all the people groups of the world? (Make Disciples). Remember earlier I said that even this text helps us understand what a disciple is.

A disciple is one who has not only been converted but has been baptized into the body of Christ and taught and trained how to be obedient to Jesus. Please look at Acts 14:21-23.

When Paul was being obedient to that command of the Lord what did he do?

Yes, he evangelized, he witnessed to the saving grace of God through Jesus. Yes, he led men and women to saving faith in Jesus. But what did he always do with those converts? He formed them into churches!

If you study the book of Acts and read the letters of the Apostle Paul and others - you will always find that they did not consider the commission of our Lord fulfilled until in each of those people groups the church was established and it was strong. Look at Acts 15:36,41 READ Did Paul consider his task done when he won a convert and helped that person grow in their understanding of obedience to Christ? No. The task wasn't done until he had established a local church - a healthy, reproducing church. It is not enough for us today to simply go around winning converts and calling ourselves faithful to the commission. Unless a church is established in those people groups we have not done what our Lord commanded. The implications of this principle for our missions outreach are great. To be true to Jesus' command we will not place highest priority on evangelism alone. We will not send evangelistic teams to other people groups and call that equally strategically important as establishing and strengthening the local church in that people group. Just getting people to pray a prayer of repentance and faith is not a responsible fulfillment of the great commission. We are called to establish and strengthen the church - that is how disciples are made. Therefore our missions strategy will place highest priority on establishing and strengthening the church.

Significantly that principle of establishing churches as highest priority in fact answers a question that I suspect many of you have already had.

While I have been talking about God's desire to make disciples from all people groups and while I have been talking about God's top priority being the establishment of the church, YOU WERE WONDERING "Doesn't that suggest that some people are more important to God than others?" And you think to yourself - "I thought God loved everyone equally - so what difference would it make if the next person who became a Christian was from Timbuktu or from the house next door?" Isn't God just interested in getting as many saved as possible? There are three responses to that idea:

1. God is still sovereign and he fully aware of everyone whom He will call to himself.

He is not running scared trying to get everything done before Jesus returns. He is fully in control and the plan he has laid out is the best plan for accomplishing his purposes.

2. Secondly, because God is the boss, even if we didn't understand why he planned things certain ways we would do well to obey him. After all we do trust that he knows the end from the beginning better than we do.
3. Every person is equally important to God but not every person is equally strategic.

Think of it this way: If you wanted to sell cameras in every country of the world would you do it best by trying to sell to every American first before branching out to other people groups? No, you would go to the other people groups and establish a sales team and then let them reach their own people. It would be much more effective in the long run. If God's goal is to make disciples in every people group of the world, it will be much more effective if while we are reaching our own people group we are also establishing beachheads in every other people group in the world. At the same time that we are being faithful witnesses right here in our own country we are also helping to establish and strengthen the church in the other people groups of the world. And as those churches are strengthened they will be able to reach into their own people much more effectively than we ever could. Yes, God is interested in every person but He has determined that the way everyone he has called to be his own will be reached is by establishing and strengthening local churches in every people group of the world.

The leadership of this local church - Southern Gables - takes Christ's commission seriously. We believe that World Evangelization is not simply an activity we engage in like prayer, worship, Bible study, but is a task to be accomplished. We want to use our resources most strategically to accomplish the mission Jesus has given us. Or as Jesus said it, "This gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations (people groups) and then the end will come." What is exciting is that we know how many people groups there are in this world. It is a finite number. We know in what people groups there is a strong, reproducing church movement such as there is in the United States. We know in what people groups there is a struggling church that needs our assistance. And we know in what people groups there are no Christians or so few that there is not even yet a church established.

Oh, I am not suggesting for a minute that we can program this thing, and fund this thing and strategize in such a way that we can finish this task by ourselves or even with every other church helping us - apart from the power and working of the Holy Spirit of God. To be certain, only God's Spirit can give spiritual life, only God's Spirit can cause spiritual growth to take place in a person. But God has promised his Spirit. He told those first followers of his and it applies to us as well, "You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in Judea and Samaria and to the ends of the earth" - to every people

group. By God's power, this is mission possible - God will's it, God will enable.