

12. Mission and Commission (1Q Discipleship 2008)

Biblical material: Matt. 25:31-46; Mark 16:14-20; Luke 24:36-53; John 3:14-19; Rom. 5:6-10; 1 Cor. 5:7; 15:3, 4; Gal. 1:4; 1 Pet. 2:22-25.

Quotes

- Christianity is not true because it works. It works because it is true. *Os Guinness*
- All other religions are oblique: the founder stands aside and introduces another speaker... Christianity alone is direct speech. *Soren Kierkegaard*
- *Testimony* is not a synonym for *autobiography*! When we are truly witnessing, we are not talking about ourselves but about Christ. *John R. W. Stott*
- The Bible calls the good man's life a light; and it is the nature of light to flow out spontaneously in all directions, and fill the world unconsciously with its beams. *Horace Bushnell*

Questions

What exactly is our mission, and our commission? What—or who—are we representing, and how? Why did God choose to use human representatives to share his message? What are positive and negative aspects of this? What's the difference between mission and commission? What does God *really* want us to do and say?

Discussion/ Comment

The introduction to this week's lesson says much about justification by faith—even Luther's addition of the word "alone" is also there. The question behind all this is—what does it mean? Remember Ellen White's comment on this very point regarding "justification" and "sanctification" (see below). We need to make sure that we are communicating effectively when we are talking about God and his message. Otherwise we are simply wasting our time...

So what exactly is the mission to which we've been commissioned? Many have tried to provide the Christian mission statement or vision statement. Even if we simply say that we're to go and tell the whole world about Jesus, what does that actually mean? Many have misunderstood the truths that Jesus came to share, and the salvation he is. So let's not be content with time-worn clichés, as comfortable and familiar as they may be. We need to explain in words that work in today's society. Most of all we need to back to speaking about God, for as John Newton said, "Only God is permanently interesting."

The key verse in Luke's account of the commissioning of the disciples is 24:45—"Then he opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures." Our role is to try to make the Scriptures open and accessible to everyone. This means explaining in concepts they understand the meaning of this book that is over two millennia and more old. Added to that is the pervasive influence of language and expressions that may have meant much to an older generation of Christians, but not today.

For example, the comment that justification by faith and the third angel's message are "the same" needs some clarification. Both are challenging concepts to share in today's world that is moving further and further away from Biblical language. How do we share in simple language the message of good news, the truth about God? For example, one Biblical passage we are referred to this week is John 3:14-19. This includes John 3:16, such a vital verse. But this

selection begins with the bronze snake lifted up in the desert as an image for eternal life! How do we explain this in terms that people can understand?

Similarly, how do we as disciples help those who don't understand about God—by using such texts at Romans 5:9? “Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved from God’s wrath through him!” (NIV). There’s a great deal of theological baggage here, and some may be very concerned to make sure we hold on to such loaded terms. But if they do not convey meaning, or the right meaning, then we as the ambassadors of Christ, speaking for him, must do our best to use terms that people *will* understand!

So if, just as a hypothetical example, we paraphrased Romans 5:9 this way: “Now that we have been made right with God through the life and death of Jesus, how much more will we be saved by Jesus from the judgment that leads to eternal death!” Are upset? Have our cherished doctrines been destroyed by the change of language? Or are we helping people of our day to understand what God is trying to communicate to them?

Similarly imagine standing up on a street corner and shouting out 1 Cor. 5:7 about getting rid of the old yeast. What kind of reception do you think you would receive? In the context of Passover and unleavened bread, yeast is clearly a symbol of evil. Jesus also referred to the “leaven of the Pharisees.” But if you don’t have such imagery in your heritage, what then? People today would have a hard job understanding why you had such a problem with yeast!

Paul summarized the early Christians message in 1 Cor. 15:3, 4: Jesus lived, died, was buried, rose from the dead, and lives today. It’s not that hard to tell the story—of course the meaning is mind-boggling... Perhaps we would do well to try and share the story, which is what God has done all through time, rather than become engrossed in all the philosophical implications. Defining belief is much harder than trusting in God. You still need to know the God you are trusting, but you may not be able to explain all the details of the salvation process... In the same way Galatians 1:4 tells us that Jesus gave himself for our sins to rescue us, but does not explain how. (Even there the translation could be different—instead of “rescue,” it could equally well be “set free.”) So too 1 Peter 2:22-25 Jesus “took away our sins in his body on the cross.” How does that work? someone may ask. But the emphasis must be more on process and effect than mechanism. As Jesus himself said, “if I am lifted up, I will draw all to me.” The drawing power of the cross is the revelation of God. Only as we choose to respond to God’s demonstration of utter love can we be healed. That’s the answer.

Ellen White Comments

A little girl once asked me, “Are you going to speak this afternoon?” “No, not this afternoon,” I replied. “I am very sorry,” she said. “I thought you were going to speak, and I asked several of my companions to come. Will you please ask the minister to speak easy words that we can understand? Will you please tell him that we do not understand large words, like ‘justification’ and ‘sanctification’? We do not know what these words mean.”

The little girl’s complaint contains a lesson worthy of consideration by teachers and ministers. Are there not many who would do well to heed the request, “Speak easy words, that we may know what you mean”?

Make your explanations clear, for I know that there are many who do not understand many of the things said to them. Let the Holy Spirit mold and fashion your speech, cleansing it from all dross. Speak as little children, remembering that there are many well advanced in years who are but little children in understanding. {CT 254}