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OUR MISSION AND HOW TO FULFILL IT

Luke 24:44-49

By

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Luke Lesson 116

Our Mission and How to Fulfill It Luke 24:44-49

A young boy asked his mother and grandmother to play with him in his new sandbox in the front yard. He equipped each of them with a shovel and pail, which they promptly put to use at his request. As the two women became involved in conversation, they began to notice that people passing by seemed very interested in what they were doing. It was then they realized that they had become so busy in talking, they had not noticed that the little boy had gone into the back yard to play—leaving them alone in the sandbox. (In *Reader's Digest*, 9/86, p. 25).

It's easy, as time goes by, to lose your focus on what you're doing and why you're doing it. But if you forget what your purpose is, you can look awfully silly. It's not uncommon for churches to forget what their mission is and to get involved in all sorts of activities and programs that do not serve that mission. Thus we must be clear about our mission as a church and how we are to fulfill it.

The risen Lord Jesus spells this out in our text. These words may have been spoken on the first Resurrection Sunday or they may represent a summary of what Jesus taught the disciples over the 40 days between His resurrection and His ascension. It was this teaching that transformed these men from being confused, discouraged, and fearful into bold, courageous witnesses who were willing to die for their faith and mission. Our Lord's teaching here is not just for the apostles or for those in full-time ministry. Every member of Christ's church is to be involved in seeking first the kingdom of God. We all must make Christ's purpose our purpose. Here He spells out what our mission is and how we are to fulfill it.

We must proclaim repentance for forgiveness of sins in Christ's name to all the nations, in the power of the Spirit.

1. Our mission is to proclaim repentance for forgiveness of sins in Christ's name to all the nations.

In spelling out this mission, Jesus first mentions the *source* of it, namely, God's Word (24:44-45); He then gives the *subject* of the

mission, the work He had accomplished on the cross and the necessary response to it (24:46-47a); and He gives the *scope* of the mission, the world, or all the nations, beginning at Jerusalem (24:47b).

A. The source of our mission is the Word of God (24:44-45).

Just as Jesus had explained to the men on the Emmaus Road the things concerning Himself in all the Scriptures (24:27), so here He explains concerning His death and resurrection that “all things which are written about Me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled” (24:44). The word “must” is the same Greek word that we found in 24:7 and 26, pointing to the necessity of God’s sovereign plan being fulfilled. Luke wants us to know that the death of Jesus was not an accident, nor ultimately the result of sinful men getting the upper hand. It was God’s sovereign purpose, in fulfillment of many Old Testament Scriptures.

This is the only biblical reference to the three divisions of the Old Testament. Usually it is referred to as Moses and the prophets (as in 24:27). This more thorough division emphasizes that every part of God’s revelation points to Jesus Christ, suffering for our sins and rising triumphantly from the dead to reign in power and glory. Darrel Bock explains, “Luke’s point is that Jesus is showing how the whole of Old Testament teaching fits together as promise and how it was always intended to be seen in this way” (*Luke* [Baker], 2:1937).

We need to understand how important the written Word of God was to the Lord Jesus Christ. His life fulfilled what God had written through His servants in that book. He was not a maverick, doing His own thing. He lived in obedience to God’s Word. Everything He did was in relation to the phrase, “It is written.” With regard to our mission, this implies two things:

1) We are not free to make up our own message.

The message is fixed in God’s Word. The disciples were not a bunch of clever religious geniuses who came up with some new ideas. They were not profound philosophers who speculated about what God is like and how we can get in contact with Him. They were *witnesses* of these things (24:48). Faithful witnesses don’t make up a story; they tell what they have seen and heard. And what they

saw and heard in Jesus Christ was completely in line with what God had revealed in His written Word.

Even so, our message is contained in the Bible. It is God's revelation to us about Himself, about our sin and need for a Savior, and about the Savior whom He sent, Jesus Christ. We are not free to modify the message if it isn't to our liking. We are not free to take part of it that appeals to us and skip the parts that step on our toes. Yet many popular preachers do just that. One of them tells us that if Jesus could speak to us today, He would not tell us that we are miserable sinners. Rather, He would tell us to be proud of who we are, to stop putting ourselves down, and to start enjoying the dignity that is our God-intended destiny. He says that God wants all of us to feel good about ourselves and that to be born again is to be changed from a negative to a positive self-image (Robert Schuller, *Self Esteem, the New Reformation* [Word] pp. 47, 58, 68). This man sells millions of books in Christian bookstores, and yet he is making up his own message, not proclaiming the message of the Bible. God's Word is the source of our mission and message.

- 2) We cannot understand God's Word without God's enabling.

Jesus "opened their minds to understand the Scriptures" (24:45). This shows us the deity of Christ, that He had the power to open the minds of men to understand what before had been hidden or confusing to them. The Bible reveals to us things that are spiritually discerned, which the natural man cannot understand (1 Cor. 2:11-16). Even though the disciples had been born again, their minds were not able to grasp what Jesus had predicted about His death and resurrection until this point (9:45; 18:34). Jesus had to open their minds and He had the power to do it. Any message or teaching that diminishes the full deity of Jesus Christ is not in line with Scripture.

This also shows us our total dependence on the Lord if we want to fulfill the mission He has given us. Those who do not know Christ are spiritually blind, unable to see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ (2 Cor. 4:4). No amount of clever salesmanship or persuasive arguments on our part can lift that spiritual blindness. We may be able to talk a person into making a decision, but only Christ can impart sight to spiritually blind eyes. So as we

share the gospel, we must pray that God would open the person's mind to the truth of His Word. In addition, we must pray that He would open our minds as we read and study His Word, so that we can understand it more clearly. The source of our mission is God's Word. We need to be clear about its core message.

B. The subject of our mission is the work of Jesus Christ on the cross.

Christ had to suffer and rise again from the dead so that repentance for forgiveness of sins could be proclaimed in His name (24:46-47). The main subject of the Bible is how sinners can be reconciled to a holy God. The Bible is abundantly clear that we cannot be reconciled to the holy God by our good works. If anyone could make it to God by good works, then there was no need for Christ to die on the cross. By His death, He paid the penalty that we deserved, satisfying God's perfect justice, so that He is free to offer a pardon to anyone who trusts in what Christ did on his behalf. This is why Christ's death was necessary. Without it there can be no forgiveness of sins. We need to be clear and to make clear three things about the work of Christ on the cross:

1) The work of Christ on the cross demands that we repent of our sins.

Christ calls us to proclaim repentance. Spurgeon has an excellent sermon called, "Christ's First and Last Subject" (*The New Park Street Pulpit* [Baker], 6:341) in which he points out that Jesus began His ministry preaching, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand" (Matt. 4:17) and He ends it by telling the disciples to proclaim repentance. Thus repentance is the keynote of His ministry. Some argue that to preach repentance to sinners is to add works to faith alone. They say that all that is necessary for salvation is to believe in Christ; repentance may come later, but we cannot demand it before faith. Others define repentance as simply changing one's mind about Christ. Before the person did not think that Jesus was God; when he repents, he changes his mind to thinking that He is God. Both of these views are inadequate.

Repentance means to turn to God from our sin. It is not separate from saving faith, but it is the flip side of saving faith, so that it is often used interchangeably for it (here; Acts 2:38; 3:19;

5:31; 11:18; 20:21; 26:18, 20). Spurgeon (in the sermon mentioned) draws out four aspects of true repentance: *illumination*, where God opens our eyes to the horrible enormity of our sin; *humiliation*, where we lay aside our pride in our own merit and plead with God for mercy; *detestation*, where we begin to hate our sin; and, *transformation*, where we leave the sin we formerly loved, not just outwardly, but in our hearts. While God imparts repentance and saving faith at the point of salvation, we do not leave it there. It is a lifelong process for the believer. As J. C. Ryle puts it,

Repentance and remission are not mere elementary truths, and milk for babes. The highest standard of sanctity is nothing more than a continual growth in practical knowledge of these two points. The brightest saint is the man who has the most heart-searching sense of his own sinfulness, and the liveliest sense of his own complete acceptance in Christ (*Expository Thoughts on the Gospels*, Luke 11-24, pp. 518-519).

How can a person who has a hard heart toward God, a person who is blinded by pride in his own goodness, a person who is dead in transgressions and sins, repent? Is he supposed to turn inward and work it up somehow? That would be impossible! The Bible clearly states that while it is our duty to repent (Acts 17:30), God must grant repentance (Acts 5:31; 11:18). If you lack a repentant heart, ask God to give you one. Keep asking until He grants it. When He does, you will not boast in your repentance, but only in God's free grace.

- 2) The work of Christ on the cross directs us to proclaim forgiveness from the penalty of sin to the repentant sinner.

Forgiveness of sins is the first and foremost need of every person who has sinned against God. Sinners do not first need to know how to patch up their broken marriages. They don't first need to know how to succeed in life. They certainly do not first need to know how to improve their self-esteem! Sinners need to know how they can obtain forgiveness from God. God's answer is, sinners will be forgiven when they repent of their sins and trust in Christ's blood that was shed on the cross.

Such forgiveness is not partial; it is total. The blood of Jesus cleanses us from all sin (1 John 1:7; Heb. 10:10-18). The forgiven sinner who has trusted in Christ's shed blood need never fear that God will bring up some hidden sin at the judgment. As Paul proclaims, "Who will bring a charge against God's elect? God is the one who justifies; who is the one who condemns? Christ Jesus is He who died, yes, rather who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who also intercedes for us" (Rom. 8:33-34). Thus nothing can separate us from God's great love in Christ (Rom. 8:35-39)!

God's forgiveness in Christ is granted instantly at the moment the sinner repents and turns to Jesus Christ for pardon. It is not based on our earning it by our penance or merit over time. It is granted by His free and abundant grace. Because God grants it by His grace and because He has promised never to take back His gift, it will never be rescinded. You don't have to worry about a recall!

Further, God's forgiveness is offered to the worst of sinners. Jesus told the disciples to proclaim this message of forgiveness "beginning from Jerusalem" (24:47). What had just happened in Jerusalem? They had killed their Messiah! In spite of repeated warnings and the evidence of repeated miracles, the religious leaders in Jerusalem had wickedly murdered the Lord of glory! Surely the disciples weren't hearing the Lord correctly? "Jerusalem? You want us to proclaim forgiveness of sins in this sinful city?" Yes, thank God, His judgment on that city was delayed! The Lord's words, "beginning at Jerusalem," tell us that there is no sinner that God cannot save. Our mission is to offer forgiveness of sins to the worst of sinners if they will repent.

- 3) The work of Christ on the cross directs us to offer forgiveness to repentant sinners in Jesus' name.

If this message came from men, we could not believe it. If the disciples had concocted the plan that if the worst of sinners would repent and believe in Jesus, he would be instantly, totally, and permanently forgiven, we would have said, "That can't be!" But the risen Lord Jesus Christ commands them to proclaim this message *in His name*, that is, by His authority and by virtue of everything that He is and everything that He did in His death and resurrection in fulfillment of the Scriptures.

If you are sharing Christ and someone tries to argue with you, don't join the argument as if it is your word against his word. Rather, point them to God's Word. You cannot raise a dead sinner to life, but the name of Jesus can! "There is salvation in no one else; for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men, by which we must be saved" (Acts 4:12). We are to go in Jesus' authority, proclaiming who He is and what He has done. The subject of our mission is the person and work of Jesus Christ, who offers forgiveness of sins to every repentant sinner in His name.

Thus the source of our mission is the Word of God. The subject of our mission is the work of Christ.

C. The scope of our mission is the whole world.

We are to proclaim this message "to all the nations, beginning in Jerusalem." The word "nations" is the Greek *ethne*, from which we get our word "ethnic." As you probably know, in the past 25 years there has been a radical new focus in missions, the "people-group" approach. Ralph Winter, who pioneered this concept, defines a people group as "the largest group within which the Gospel can spread as a church planting movement without encountering barriers of understanding or acceptance" (*Mission Frontiers*, June, 2000, p. 25). In 1974, approximately one-half of the world's population lived in unreached people groups. Today, just one-third are in that category. So progress is being made, but there is much work left to be done. One-third equals two billion people!

How this concept works, for example, is that rather than viewing the nation of Mexico as one nation, it is viewed as consisting of many different people groups who have different primary languages, customs, and cultural characteristics. To evangelize Mexico, we must see churches planted in each of these people groups. To that end, our church has adopted one group, the Durango Nahuatl, as an unreached group that we are committed to reach through prayer, finances, and other means.

To be obedient to Christ's command, we need to send missionaries to these many unreached groups around the world. Even if we saw thousands come to Christ in Flagstaff, unless we cross linguistic and cultural barriers with the gospel, there will still be two

billion unreached people who have no opportunity to hear about Jesus Christ. So we must have our focus on the lost people groups of the world. Pray for them to be reached. For years, our family has used the "Global Prayer Digest" (available from the U.S. Center for World Mission), a monthly prayer guide for the unreached peoples of the world. Support missionaries committed to reaching these unreached groups. Instill a vision for missions in your children. Be open to God's leading you to go. We should begin in our Jerusalem, but our eyes should be on the whole world. By the way, we have a unique opportunity in Flagstaff, with over 400 international students in our town. If we neglect reaching out to them, we are not obeying our Lord's command here.

Admittedly, it is an overwhelming task! How can we possibly do it? The Lord tells us in verse 49:

2. To fulfill our mission we must have the power of the Holy Spirit.

Again, note the deity of the Lord Jesus Christ and the implicit reference to the Trinity here. Jesus has the authority to send forth the promise of His Father, by which He means the Holy Spirit (John 14:16-17, 26; 16:7-14; Acts 1:8; 2:33). To be clothed with the Spirit is a word picture that describes being surrounded and marked by the Spirit, just as your clothes cover your body and identify you to others. On the Day of Pentecost, ten days after Jesus' ascension, He sent the Holy Spirit on His followers in fulfillment of this promise. Since that day, all who repent and trust in Christ receive the Holy Spirit at the moment of salvation (Rom. 8:9; 1 Cor. 12:13). But we must learn to walk in the Spirit, depending on His strength, doing nothing to grieve or quench His fullness and power in our lives (Gal. 5:16-23; Eph. 4:30; 5:18; 1 Thess. 5:19).

Here we are looking primarily at the power of the Holy Spirit that we need to bear witness of Christ. It is significant that the apostle Paul asked the Ephesian church to pray for him, so that he could proclaim the gospel boldly (Eph. 6:19-20). I wouldn't have guessed that Paul was lacking in boldness, but he knew his own weakness and asked for prayer in that area! He asked the Colossians to pray that he could make the gospel clear (Col. 4:4). Again, I would have thought that Paul of all people could make the gospel

clear! Yet he knew that he must depend on the Holy Spirit when he proclaimed the gospel. He also asked for prayer that God would open doors for the word.

If Paul needed prayer for these things, how much more should we be praying for the Holy Spirit to empower us and provide openings so that we can proclaim the gospel to those who are lost! You have probably seen things on TV where they said, "Do not try this at home!" They mean, you could get hurt since this is a dangerous activity. The warning regarding witnessing is, "Do not try this in your own strength!" You need the Holy Spirit's power!

Conclusion

Three concluding applications: *(1) Make sure that you can present by memory the basic plan of salvation, with appropriate Scripture references.* If you do not have in mind a basic outline of the gospel, along with the Bible verses to support it, you cannot be an effective witness. If you'd like training, sign up for the Evangelism Explosion class. Get a copy of the tape by Bill Fay.

(2) Ask God to keep you focused on your mission. Don't get sidetracked into the sandbox of secondary things while souls around you need to hear about the Savior. Ask God for opportunities to bear witness. Pray for world missions. Give to missionaries. Pray about being involved yourself in missions. All the junk we work so hard to collect is going up in smoke someday. The souls that we reach for Christ will be with us in heaven for eternity.

(3) Remember, your mission is to be a witness. Jesus didn't call us to be champion debaters or brilliant orators or astute philosophers. He called us to be *witnesses*. The job of a witness is simple: he tells what he has seen and heard. Like the man born blind whom Jesus healed, you may not be able to debate theology, but you can say, "One thing I do know, that, whereas I was blind, now I see" (John 9:25). You can tell people, "I know that if you will repent of your sins and believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, He will forgive all your sins. He did that for me. He will do that for you."

Our mission: To proclaim repentance for forgiveness of sins in Christ's name to all the nations. How we fulfill it: In the power of the Holy Spirit.

Discussion Questions

1. Discuss: The Great Commission is every Christian's job, not just the job of those gifted in evangelism.
2. How can God demand repentance when unbelievers are unable to repent? Is this "mocking them" as some charge?
3. Some argue that simple faith (with no repentance) is all that is needed for salvation. How would you refute this?
4. Is the task of being a foreign missionary a special calling? How can those at home keep missions as their focus?
5. How can we experience the power of the Holy Spirit in our daily lives?

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