

God's mission before us

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Last week when talking about being a Barnabas from our study in Acts I said something that I felt was quite confronting when I looked back at it that I believe this week God wants me to expound upon a bit further this morning.

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I said quite strongly that I guarantee that if we as a church don't have God's mission of taking Jesus to a dying world always before us that we could end up not having a church.

It was a big statement that I firmly believe, but after thinking about it a bit more this week I felt God want me to explain in a bit more detail in regard to why and what that means for us as a church.

So, let's think for a moment about the bible and I want to ask a question of significant importance.

What would have happened if Adam fully obeyed God in the garden and did not sin? Would there even be a need for a bible?

After giving this some consideration, I think you would agree that there would be no real need for the bible. What purpose would it serve?

The fact that from Genesis 3 onwards begins a story of God's mission to win back a people for himself from every tribe nation and tongue as it says Revelation.

Revelation 5:9-10

9 And they sang a new song, saying, "Worthy are you to take the scroll and to open its seals, for you were slain, and by your blood you ransomed people for God from every tribe and language and people and nation,
10 and you have made them a kingdom and priests to our God, and they shall reign on the earth."

The fact that we have a bible and it describes in painstaking detail the story of God redeeming or buying back a people for his glory showing us all the way through that God is on a mission, God comes after us.

Now let's be honest. When we look at the whole of the story of God doing what only he can, if you are anything like me you would be saying surely there has to be a quicker way?

If you think about it he predicts the coming of his son way back in Genesis 3 and predicts the fulfillment of the ages in Revelation 22 his son coming back a second time for the multitudes who have put their faith in him down through the ages.

So let's take a look at this story of God's mission in picture form that is best seen as an overview of the whole bible and we will look at key milestones.

For some of you this will be a refresher while for others it will fill in a few gaps. What I want us to get from this overview is the sense of the storyline the narrative of God's mission.

The following overheads have been taken from The Bible Overview by Matthias Media and it put forward the idea that the Old Testament sets the foundation for the mission while the New Testament provides the fulfillment and culmination of the mission.

The following is based loosely on The Bible Overview by Matthias Media.

FOUNDATION - Old Testament

Creation

Adam & Eve created in perfect harmony to live with their creator forever and ever. They had it all and it could have and should have stayed that way.

Fall

Adam & Eve fall for the serpent's temptation and disobey God's clear and distinct command. They fall dramatically from the grace of God and are sent out of the Garden of Eden that represented God's intimate presence with them.

They fall into the slavery of sin, Satan, spiritual death and eventually physical death. They also take down with them all of us who in effect are their seed and as a result humans become sinners both by nature and by choice.

But God does not leave them without hope and promises that one day one will come who will pay the price to purchase them back out of this slavery and restore them back to himself.

Babel

But not long into the story the people of the earth conspire together to '**make a name for themselves**' and build a tower so large that it would reach into the heavens.

Genesis 11:4

Then they said, "Come, let us build ourselves a city and a tower with its top in the heavens, and let us make a name for ourselves, lest we be dispersed over the face of the whole earth."

In essence - this is man trying to reach God in their own strength.
A picture of THEIR righteousness based on THEIR good deeds.

Pledge to Abram

Then he calls Abram and promises to '*make his name great*', to bring him and his family into a promised land and to bless all the families of the earth through him.

In essence - this God reaching down to man in God's own strength.
A picture of THEIR righteousness based on HIS good deed.

Exodus from slavery

But before the Promised Land is entered, there is heaps of pain and suffering for God's people over a 400 year period. Under the burden of Pharaoh, Moses becomes their savior to bring God's people out of slavery and to a new country where they are to worship him in complete freedom. Although it was the wilderness it was freedom from slavery.

In essence - this is a prophetic picture of Jesus entering human history for the first time to save God's people from slavery so that they may worship God alone and be set completely free.

Promised Land

Under Moses God's people did not enter the promised land. Joshua becomes the savior that leads God's people into the Promised Land.

Moses leads them out - Joshua leads them in.

In essence - this is a prophetic picture of Jesus entering human history for the second time to take all of God's people down through the ages into the final Promised Land of the new heavens and the new earth.

Law

After the exodus God gives his people the Law, the tabernacle with its continual sacrifices that designed to turn away God's anger against their sin (via a substitute dying their place) and the priests who were set apart to be the mediators between God and man.

These together formed God's government (the second theocracy) whose king and governor was God alone.

The Law of God covers everything that Israel needs to live in a right relationship with God.

On the positive side it showed them what they must do but on the negative side it also showed them that they could not do it their own strength.

It continues to set the stage for Jesus to do what we could not do.

Romans 8:3-4

3 For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do. By sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, he condemned sin in the flesh,

4 in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.

Kings

Because of the continual sin of Israel they once again rebel against God and desire to be like the nations around them and have a king of their own.

In essence - they reject God as their king and seek to establish their own.

Exile

After a long history of God's incredible patience with a stubborn and rebellious nation he hands them over to foreign rulers and sends them away into exile, but they are not forgotten as we will see on the day of Pentecost after the resurrection of Jesus.

Prophets

Before, during and after the exile God sent prophets whose task was to call back God's back to himself and it is in this context that we find God's mission continuing to be revealed as it moves toward its fulfillment.

Jeremiah 31:33-34

33 But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the Lord: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts. And I will be their God, and they shall be my people.

34 And no longer shall each one teach his neighbour and each his brother, saying, 'Know the Lord,' for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, declares the Lord. For I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more."

FULLFILMENT - New Testament

After a roughly 400 year period there appears to be not much happening between God and his people as they lie scattered among the nations. But this is soon about to change.

Life of Jesus

In the life of Jesus God kept his pledge by sending his son into the world.

Jesus was a Jew, an Israelite who was a descendant to King David. He lived the life of unbroken fellowship with his father that Adam, Eve and God's people the Jews should have lived and in so doing ushered in the new covenant.

He is the fulfillment of both the Law and the Prophets, by keeping the holy relationship with God while on the earth.

He alone could do this because he was fully God and fully man.

Death of Jesus

A mere 40 years after the death of Jesus the temple with all its priests and continual sacrifices representing the old covenant was to be completely destroyed the Romans under Titus.

There were to be no more physical sacrifices offered again because Jesus had become the once and for all sacrifice.

Hebrews says this of Jesus.

Hebrews 7:26-27

26 For it was indeed fitting that we should have such a high priest, holy, innocent, unstained, separated from sinners, and exalted above the heavens.

27 He has no need, like those high priests, to offer sacrifices daily, first for his own sins and then for those of the people, since he did this once for all when he offered up himself.

Raising of Jesus

The resurrection of Jesus became the way God showed us that the penalty had been paid for sin once for all for those who would be saved guaranteeing our own resurrection to life after death.

Pentecost

At Pentecost God does two things:

1st He brings His exiled people that were dispersed across the world back to Jerusalem after the resurrection where they become the early church's first believers. These believers are then enlisted in God's mission to take the gospel back to their home towns.

2nd He sends his spirit into the lives of the believers that becomes the enabling power of God to live continually in right relationship with Him.

No longer do we need to live **FOR** God by trying to do right as in the old covenant but now we live **WITH** God enabled to live right by being empowered by his spirit.

In the old covenant God's people used to go **TO** the temple - the holy place where sacrifice for sin was made daily for the forgiveness of sin.

In the new covenant God's people are **THE** temple - the holy place where the once for all sacrifice for sin lives by his spirit having declared forgiveness of sin forever.

Return of Jesus & New Creation

In the return of Jesus and the ushering in of the new creation we see the culmination of God's mission to restore what was forfeited by Adam & Eve in the Garden. Even the present earth and heavens have been affected by their sin and just as we need to be new creations in Christ so the heaven and the earth need to be made brand new also.

Conclusion & application

Jurgen Moltmann states:

Mission is not primarily an activity of the church, but an attribute of God. God is a missionary God. "It is not the church that has a mission of salvation to fulfill in the world; it is the mission of the Son and the Spirit through the Father that includes the church.

Jurgen Moltmann, *The Church in the Power of the Spirit: A Contribution to Messianic Ecclesiology*, London: SCM Press, 1977, 64

There is church because there is mission and not the other way around.

Now how does this all apply to us?

Quite simply without an understanding of God's mission and the interlinked part that he has called each of us to play; we are in danger of wasting the gift of our restored relationship with him by simply enjoying and consuming it ourselves without any sense of mission of taking it to a dying world.

In fact we see many churches from long standing denominations who have settled in this respect - they have got off mission and once the last of their parishioners dies so does the church.

The building is sold off to become a restaurant or an art gallery or a funky apartment building. It's a tragedy.

I want to finish off with a couple of thoughts that I believe God wants to remind us of and to help us stay focused on his mission as a church.

First

We have a message that must not only be seen in our lives but heard on our lips.

Romans 10:17

Faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ.

Second

Each of us has benefited from this message as individuals, but we also have a responsibility to take this message to the streets individually and I believe just as importantly together as a church.

1 Peter 2:9

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 marvellous light.

To me this is one of those areas of our witness that can be missed or forgotten altogether.

When the Western world is furiously promoting the individual, God's word is always promoting his people. We are on mission together.

Third

As the gospel is preached, churches must be started. It is the pattern of the early church and it should still be the pattern today.

You might say but isn't better to have really, really big churches that can attract lots of people and have a greater visibility in the community rather than having lots of little churches scattered around the place.

That might be right to a point, but each new church that God starts has the ability to reach people that the large churches will never reach.

We need to get behind new churches. Even though we are still one ourselves our hearts should be to always be on the look out to encourage churches that are getting started without neglecting the more established larger churches.

Let's pray.