



Our Mandate

*Therefore go and make
disciples of all 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. And surely I am with you
always, to the very end of
the age.*

Matthew 28:19-20

The Old Testament

Does the Bible give us a mandate, a directive, or a command to share with others the message of God's love and saving works? In a word, YES! From the beginning, God desired to make himself known to humankind. For example, God spoke to Abram and called him to leave his home and go to a land that God would lead him to (Genesis 12:1-3). God made a covenant with Abram that would impact all of Abram's descendants. Through this covenant God began a relationship with His people that we read about throughout the pages of the Old Testament.

In the story of Moses we see God's redemptive love for His people. The Israelites were in bondage and unable to free themselves. God heard the cries of His people and had mercy on them. He led them from slavery to the land of promise. Throughout the Old Testament—from Moses, to Joshua, to Gideon, to David, to Micah—God continued to reach out to the people and draw them to himself.

Reflect on this...

In what ways do you see God reaching out to people in the Old Testament? What methods did He use to communicate His message?

Where does the Old Testament refer to sharing our faith? What are some biblical stories or principles that encourage witnessing?

The New Testament

Jesus' very name means "savior." His name pointed to His evangelistic mission here on earth, that is, to save people from their sins. One day at the synagogue, Jesus outlined His ministry as He read from the prophet Isaiah, "The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor" (Luke 4:18-19). Jesus also said about His mission, "I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance" (Luke 5:32) and "For the Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost" (Luke 19:10). Throughout His life, Jesus sought out lost and needy people. He went to places where the blind, lame and poor people lived and offered the message of God's love.

Throughout His time on earth, everything Jesus did pointed to the Heavenly Father and to salvation for the spiritually lost. We see in the life of Jesus that He:

- Assembled twelve men together from an assortment of backgrounds to be His disciples for the purpose of touching the lives of those who had not heard the good news. This group spoke to the way God uses people of various backgrounds, education, socio-economic means, and so on to reach others.
- Healed, restored, and raised for the purpose of pointing to His divinity and demonstrating the power of God to change lives.
- Spoke to people who society alienated, ate in the homes of sinners, and touched the untouchable to show that people (everyone) matter to God.
- Was an advocate for those who faced judgment and ridicule from those in authority.

Reflect on this...

What do you already know about talking to people about Jesus?

Why does the Bible encourage witnessing?

Throughout His life, Jesus sought out lost and needy people.

Jesus preached and told stories to thousands of people to share with them what the kingdom of God was all about. Many of these stories focused on a God who seeks out the lost—a God who will go to great lengths to redeem and restore people to a right relationship with Him. For example, the Parable of the Lost Sheep (Luke 15:3-7) describes a rancher who owns a hundred sheep but is missing one. Such a rancher would leave the ninety-nine and go searching for the one. In the Parable of the Lost Coin (Luke 15:8-10), a woman loses one of ten silver coins in her possession. When the coin is found, she calls others to join her in celebrating that the one missing coin had been found! And in the Parable of the Lost Son (Luke 15:11-32), an ambitious, apparently self-centered young adult asks for his inheritance early, leaves home and wastes the money on extravagant living. His father is so overwhelmed with emotion and gladness that the son has returned he welcomes the son back into the home with all the privileges he ever had as a son. They celebrated that the lost son had returned home! These stories point to the Father's desire to bring the spiritually lost home.

Jesus' ultimate declaration of love and redemption is found in the familiar words He spoke to Nicodemus, "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him" (John 3:16-17). Jesus' words point to His supreme mission—bringing people into a right relationship with God through His life, death, and resurrection.

The Early Church

Following Jesus' resurrection, He prepared His disciples to continue His mission after His ascension to heaven. They had witnessed the life of Jesus and heard His impactful teachings. Now Jesus was ready to commission them to continue His work in this world.

Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all 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. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age" (Matthew 28:18-20).

This mandate was for these men to share the good news of salvation with the world. For such a task, Jesus did not leave them without resources. They were promised the gift of the Holy Spirit. They would receive the Holy Spirit, and through the Spirit's power they would be able to share the good news of the gospel with humankind. His final words,

"Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised, which you have heard me speak about . . . you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth" (Acts 1:4, 8).

From that point forward, those who called themselves Christ-followers have been called to share the good news with others through the empowerment of the Holy Spirit. How do we know this? We read in the book of Acts how these early followers (Christians) made an impact on others with the message and love of Christ. These people became part of the “early church.” For example, Peter, under the anointing of the Holy Spirit, spoke boldly to the crowd in Jerusalem, calling them to repent and be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ (Acts 2). Three thousand became believers on that day alone! The message of salvation was shared first among the Jews; however, God revealed to Peter that this promise was for all people (see Acts 10). There became no geographical boundary for the good news. God blessed and anointed their work, and the church thrived, despite persecution.

Since the early church, people like St. Francis, John Wesley, Billy Graham, and yes, people like you and me have been spreading the message of good news in the world. What was started by the first-followers continues today. Jesus’ command to “make disciples of all nations, baptizing them . . . and teaching them to obey everything [Christ] has commanded [us]” (Mark 1:17) was not just for those who heard this firsthand, but extends to us today. It is a call to us personally, and it is a call to us corporately as His Church—the body of Christ. The Church does not exist to serve itself, it exists to reach out and serve others with the message and love of Christ. The passion which Christ demonstrated in His all-out effort to reach spiritually lost people is the passion we discover as we earnestly seek to follow Him and to be more like Him.

Romans 10:9-13 says,

If you declare with your mouth, “Jesus is Lord,” and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you profess your faith and are saved. As Scripture says, “Anyone who believes in him will never be put to shame.” For there is no difference between Jew and Gentile—the same Lord is Lord of all and richly blesses all who call on him, for, “Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.”

This is the good news of the gospel! ●

Reflect on this...

Think about your attempts to witness—fears, failures, and successes. What have you learned from your experiences?

What is our role in reaching unsaved people? What is God’s role in reaching unsaved people?

NOTES

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