

Acts 18:1-17

Outward Church: The Mission of God

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(S1) What do you think of when you hear the word “Missionaries?” I sometimes think of two young men, dressed in blue khakis, wearing white shirts and ties. They’re wearing nametags, “Elder Tim” and “Elder Rob.” Mormon missionaries. I remember the time I filled out a form on their website to receive a free copy of the Book of Mormon, and the confirmation page said, “Some missionaries will be by to deliver it soon.” I was like, what?! I thought they’d mail it to me.

When the Mormon missionaries showed up at my house, I tried to share the gospel with them. I shared how at the cross, Jesus not only pays for our sins, but he makes us holy. He makes us righteous. They’d never heard that before. I tried to be a missionary to the missionaries.

Have you ever been on a missions trip? When I was ten, my family took a Missions Trip to Mexico, where we helped out at an orphanage and helped repair a house for a family. When I was about fourteen, I went on a mission trip to Argentina, where we teamed up with some local churches and helped them do outreach through gospel performances. I got to be the mime that tried wealth and partying and then turned to Jesus. Around then, I also helped out on a Missions Trip to Nebraska, where our middle-school team washed dishes at a Christian camp for a week. More recently, I’ve gone to France a couple of times.

Have you ever been on a mission trip? What do you think of it? When I told my old boss we were going to Argentina, she told me she didn’t think it was right for us to proselytize. What do you think? Was it right or wrong for my church to go do gospel skits in the park in Santiago del Estero and Catamarca, Argentina? My generation, Christian Millennials, are conflicted about missions. According to Barna: **(S2-4)**

- 96% of Christian millennials agree that “Part of my faith means being a witness about Jesus.”
- 94% of Christian millennials agree that “The best thing that could ever happen to someone is for them to come to know Jesus.”
- 47% of Christian millennials agree with this statement, “It is wrong to share one’s personal beliefs with someone of a different faith in hopes that they will one day share the same faith.”

So, we feel rather conflicted. We want people to know Jesus, but we think it’s wrong to be a missionary? Where are you at? Do you agree? Disagree? Wherever you’re at, I want to put a few ideas in your head today that might help you understand what the Bible says. The concept of mission comes from God himself.

(S5) Our God is a God of mission.

As my missions professor taught us, the idea of mission is actually “rooted in the heart of God.” There is something about God’s character that mission flows out of who he is. We see this as far back as Genesis when God blessed Abraham, his descends, and said Israel would be a blessing to the whole world.

(S6) Genesis 12:2-3 (ESV)

And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.”

God took Abraham and his family, and through them, blessed the whole world. It's through his line and his descendants that we get Jesus, God's blessing for all peoples. The prophet Isaiah said this of Israel.

(S7) Isaiah 49:6b (ESV)

I will make you as a light for the nations,
that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth."

Our God wants to send out his salvation through his people to the end of the earth. Our God is a God of mission. It's in his being. "Missions" (plural) flows out of "mission" (singular).¹ This means the reason believers share about Christ with the hopes of others coming to faith in Jesus is because God wants to rescue and reconcile all peoples. He likes to work through us to do it. This is called the:

(S8) "Missio Dei" (Mission of God)

That's Latin for "Mission of God" or the "sending of God." God wants to send his people out into the world to accomplish his mission. That's why we're called "Missionaries." Our God is a God of mission. We find the Missio Dei throughout the gospels and Acts. The first one you might know:

(S9) Matthew 28:16-20 (ESV)

"Go therefore and make disciples of all nations..."

My missions professor thought this is a call to go out "make disciples," which "leads to church planting."

(S10) Luke 24:46-47 (ESV)

"Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, and that repentance for the forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem.

Luke talks about the role of the church to proclaim repentance and forgiveness to all the nations.

(S11) John 20:21 (ESV)

Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you."

John speaks to the sending nature of God and of the sending nature of the church. We need to raise people up to send them out into the world. Jesus sent his disciples to go, and we do too. We even find God's mission in our current series, Acts.

(S12) Acts 1:8 (ESV)

But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth."

Then what do we see in Acts? We see the gospel spread from Jerusalem to Judea to where we are, now on Paul's second missionary journey all the way in Corinth, West of Athens, Greece. The "Missio Dei" (the Mission of God) tells us that it's in God's very nature to go out and get those who don't know him yet. That means God is the only one who is really on mission. He's the one doing the work; he just invites us to join. Because God exudes mission, he gives followers of Christ a heart for the mission too.

I invited Rob Cooper to come and preach at Cornerstone. He's going to preach on March 14th. Rob was on a plane and wanted to tell the rugged and handsome man sitting next to him about Jesus. And that man sitting next to Rob Cooper, our own Mark Pender, wanted to tell the man sitting next to him about Jesus. Both

¹ World Mission of the Church at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary.

wanted to tell the other about Christ, and both had faith (even confidence) that God could do something. They were on mission because they believe in a God of mission. This means...

(S13) He is the God who goes before us.

I think Paul might be getting tired and worn out. 1 Corinthians 2:3 tells us he was actually pretty afraid when he came to Corinth. He's escaped several attacks and mobs at previous cities already. (S14) He just left Athens, and now he's reached Corinth. Corinth is not a place where a God-honoring religious Jew like Paul would feel very comfortable. It was like the Vegas of the ancient world; lots of money, parties, and sleeping around. He makes some friends, Priscilla and Aquila, fellow tentmakers. And they encourage him. But when he tries to share the gospel in the Synagogue, most of the Jews oppose him.

(S15) Acts 18:6 (ESV)

And when they opposed and reviled him, he shook out his garments and said to them, “Your blood be on your own heads! I am innocent. From now on I will go to the Gentiles.”

Paul loses his cool, which he rarely does, right? He's tired of being rejected by the very people who were supposed to welcome the Messiah. When Jesus sent his disciples out, he told them to shake the dust off their feet as an act of judgment against any who reject him (Matthew 10:14-15; c.f., Nehemiah 5:13).

So Paul is discouraged. Why have the Jews rejected Jesus? He writes all about that in Romans 9-11. He's discouraged, so discouraged it seems that Jesus has to show up and encourage him.

(S16) Acts 18:9-10 (ESV)

And the Lord said to Paul one night in a vision, “Do not be afraid, but go on speaking and do not be silent, for I am with you, and no one will attack you to harm you, for I have many in this city who are my people.”

There are **two things** I want us to get out of this: 1) Our God is the God who goes before us, and 2) He is the God who walks with us.

Look how Jesus says, “for I have many in this city who are my people.” What's he saying? He's telling Paul, “Don't give up! There are people in Corinth who I am going to save. I just haven't done it just yet. Keep preaching the gospel! Keep sharing me.” And then, if we look at this passage, we see two, maybe three other people who came to Christ. Right before this, we read about Titius Justus, a Gentile believer, and then Crispus, the ruler of the Synagogue, both come to faith (v7-8). So Paul, who just condemned the Jews for not believing, immediately had a leader of the Corinthian Synagogue put his faith in Christ.

Why so downcast, Paul? And then later, at the end of our story, a mob attacks Sosthenes. We're not exactly sure who he is, but in the book of Corinthians, in the very first verse, Paul addresses a man named Sosthenes, who is his brother in Christ. I think Sosthenes is attacked because of his faith in Christ. Paul addresses him in the opening of 1st Corinthians. I believe he remembered the high price Sosthenes paid for Christ. But, others would disagree with me, so I'll leave it up to you.

The point is that God goes before Paul to prepare Titius Justus, Crispus, and maybe Sosthenes. God prepares their hearts for the gospel message, and through Paul's preaching, a whole church springs up in Corinth. God is on the move, on mission before his missionaries ever arrive. This is called “Divine Initiation” (the Proprieta-evangelical) or “Preparation to the Good News.” This is the “Idea that before the missionary arrives God has been at work.” Before you or I ever show up on the scene, God is doing something, softening hearts, preparing people. Because of this:

We can trust that our missionary efforts will be successful. We can trust that because God is a God of mission, many missionary efforts will succeed. God has already chosen those who are going to come to faith

in him. It's simply our job to go out and speak. This should give us confidence in our global missionary efforts. We should have confidence in God working through Thierry in France, and Mission of Hope, Haiti, and the Vere Institute, and other organizations. We can trust God will use our local efforts too. God has people picked out in Westford, Massachusetts, who have yet to come to faith in him. That gives us confidence for our efforts, not that we shouldn't try, but that when we do try, God will do great things.

But this isn't easy. It can be hard like Paul experienced. Monica reminded me this week of one of her **students**. She had him several years ago in her New Testament class, and he was a really tough student. He argued with Monica and would go and argue about what he was learning with others. He was one of her most difficult students, but last year he visited the school again because after leaving Monica's class, he had come to faith in Christ and wanted to share his testimony. God completely transformed him, but Monica didn't get to see it happen firsthand, but what she was doing was cultivating the soil. God was using Monica to go before the individual who did lead her student to Christ. God might be using you to go before another, or he might be going before you through the work of another or his Holy Spirit. This gives us great confidence and hope in the lost coming to saving faith in Christ Jesus.

Our God is a God of mission. He is the God who goes before us and:

(S17) He is the God who walks with us.

Remember what Jesus said to Paul?

(S18) Acts 18:9-10 (ESV)

And the Lord said to Paul one night in a vision, “Do not be afraid, but go on speaking and do not be silent, for I am with you, and no one will attack you to harm you, for I have many in this city who are my people.”

Don't be afraid; I'm with you. No one is going to harm you. I got you. This is why we don't need to be afraid either, afraid to support global missionaries or to tell our neighbor about Christ. At the end of the day, this is about being “with Jesus.” Skye Jethani, in his book What's Wrong with Religion? defines “Missionalism.”

- **(S19)** The belief that the worth of one's life is determined by the achievement of a great goal started by God.

Here's the problem. We can make mission into an idol. We feel like God doesn't love us unless we're somehow producing for him. We should never confuse what flows out of God, the mission, for God himself. God is a missionary God, but the mission is not God. God, above all else, desires to be with us. If you stop and spend time with God, you're not wasting your life. I'm preaching to myself here. It's so easy to get wrapped up in doing-doing-doing that we can forget being. God just wants to be with us. That's why he gets us, not so he can send us away, but so that we can experience life with him.

It's out of being with God, a God who is a God of mission, that our missionary efforts flow. God wants us first, and he'll invite us to be part of what he is doing as we walk with him. Our God is a God of mission. He is the God who goes before us. He is the God who walks with us.

Romans 8:38-39 (ESV)

For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Pastor Jonathan Romig preached this message at Cornerstone Congregational Church. You can download a PDF copy of this sermon above. You can also listen on [Apple Podcasts](#). Read the [story of our church here](#).

Discussion Questions

1. What do you think of the concept of missions and missionaries?
2. What is the Missio Dei? What does it mean that God is a God of mission?
3. Where do we see the Missio Dei in the Old Testament and New Testament?
4. How does knowing that God goes before our efforts change the way we think about them? Does it make it feel like a waste of time? Or does it give us confidence and hope?
5. Why is being with God so important? Why is it more important than doing for God?

Sources

What's Wrong with Religion? by Skye Jethani

World Mission of the Church by Dr. Timothy C. Tennent – Gordon Conwell Theological Seminary Semlink