

Motivation for Missions

By Steven Shepard

“Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations.” (Matthew 28:19)

This is the Great Commission simply stated. What hinders its completion is not a lack of resources, strategies, or potential laborers, but a lack of motivation in God’s people. What will motivate God’s people to carry out this task? There are two motivating factors. The first is seeing the need, and the second is obedience to Christ. Biblical missions pre-supposes certain eternal realities – namely that each person is an eternal soul that will either live forever in heaven with the Lord or in hell separated from God. Each person is actually born separated from God with a sinful nature that is under God’s judgment. Though human nature recoils at this truth, this is what the Bible reveals. However, God has mercifully provided a solution, even though He was in no obligation to do so. God became a man and died on the cross in order to suffer the judgment we deserved. By believing in Jesus we are reconciled to God, will not come into judgment, and will live forever with the Lord in perfect happiness. (Eph 2:1-3; John 5:24)

The Church is to proclaim this good news about Christ to all the nations. The word used in the New Testament for nation means “ethnic group” or people group of which there are about 16,500 on the earth. Of these groups about 6,700 are still unreached with the Gospel. (joshuaproject.net) These unreached groups have no viable churches, which are capable of reaching their own people group for Christ. Unreached people groups include over three billion people. There are hundreds of thousands of villages, towns, and cities that have no churches. And there are very few Christian workers who work in these unevangelized areas. By contrast, the U.S. overflows with churches, Bibles, seminaries, vacation bible schools, Christian conferences, building programs, and Christian workers. In fact, of the funds given worldwide, about 99 percent is spent for ministry in places that are already evangelized. (aboutmissions.org) By far most of this is spent right in the U.S., which has less than five percent of the world’s population.

While the need is very great, this still should not be our primary motivation for missions, but rather obedience. Because Jesus is our sovereign Lord and Master, the fact that He gave us a commission should be reason enough to obey. We are motivated to obey because of our love for Jesus. “We love Him because He first loved us.” (1 John 4:19) When we are convinced of the love that Jesus has for us, this motivates us to obey, to pray, to go, and to help send others to take His Gospel where it is needed most. (Luke 6:46; John 14:21-23; 2 Cor 5:15)

Seeing the needs should indeed fill us with a sense of urgency for the Great Commission. Yet when we are motivated primarily by a sense of need, instead of obedience out of love, our tendency is to place an undue importance on our own work and role. Making disciples and planting churches is His work. God is the One who calls people to Himself, changes their hearts, and saves them for eternity. We are only His instruments and His fellow workers in the harvest. (1 Corinthians 3:5-9) This is a great privilege: to be involved in work that will bear fruit for eternity. And God has promised that as we go, His power and presence will go with us. Then when the last soul has come and bowed before His Majesty, Jesus will return and will receive all the glory! (Matt 28:20b; Acts 1:68; Matt 24:14)