



*Recovering the Full Mission of God: A Biblical Perspective on Being, Doing and Telling*

November 2013

\$24, 288 pages, paperback

978-0-8308-4026-7

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## Joining Jesus in Mission

Should Jesus' earthly ministry of telling and living the good news define the mission of the church today? Plainly our circumstances are vastly different from those of first-century Palestine. We cannot mimic Jesus' earthly ministry in a one-to-one fashion. Nor can we afford to confuse our mission with his singular role in God's saving purpose. Nevertheless, if we truly believe that Jesus' mission is the concrete and climactic expression of the mission of God in history, then how can we *not* let it profoundly shape us? It would have been quite natural for Jesus' early followers to think in these terms. Burrige notes that in a Jewish setting, disciples would learn to follow their masters by imitating their example, and in so doing come to understand the law. What is more, a central function of ancient biographies was to present their subjects as a pattern for readers to emulate. Since the Gospels seem to belong to this genre, we should expect that they would narrate Jesus' life and ministry in such a way that it serves as a paradigm for Christians to follow.

Most importantly, the Gospels show us that Jesus himself envisions continuity between our mission and his own. Recall that Jesus' call to discipleship is a call to share in his ministry: "Follow me, and I will make you fish for people" (Mk 1:17). John's Gospel makes our connection with Jesus' mission especially clear: as the Father sent Jesus into the world, so he sends us into the world (Jn 17:18; 20:21; cf. 13:15). The church's mission is an extension of the mission of Jesus, even as Jesus' mission is an extension of the mission of the Father. Consequently, "the church is apostolic in its being and in its doing when it embodies Jesus' mission and patterns its actions after his."

What will mission in the Jesus way mean for us? Certainly, it will not look or sound exactly like Jesus' ministry or that of the Twelve. This side of Easter, our mission is defined, not only by Jesus' earthly ministry, but by the *whole* story of Jesus—his life, teaching, proclamation, death and resurrection. Our challenge, then, is to allow the character of Jesus' mission to shape our own within our different and diverse circumstances. At the very least, such a mission will be:

- *Christ-centered.* Jesus, by the power of the Spirit, embodied God's loving mission in the world. If this is true, then our mission is not primarily about going to a particular place, following a set strategy or doing a specific kind of work. Above all we do mission by being conformed to the character and mission of Jesus.
- *Holistic.* As in Jesus' ministry, being, doing and telling are like instruments in a classical trio, playing together in perfect harmony. For us, mission "has all the dimensions and scope of Jesus' own ministry." We will not only preach and teach, but also heal and liberate, demonstrate and embody the good news.

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- *Kingdom-oriented.* We carry on Jesus' mission of announcing and demonstrating the reign of God in our varied contexts. God's people witness to the presence of God's rule in all aspects of life, even as we anticipate its all-embracing future. Our lips and our lives voice Jesus' prayer, "Your kingdom come. Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven." One implication of a kingdom-oriented mission is that the good news we tell is not only about the saving effects of Jesus' death and resurrection, as explained in the New Testament letters. It is also (and especially!) about the kingdom of God, which Jesus teaches and embodies in the Gospels.

- *Motivated by love and compassion.* Like Jesus, our compassionate responses to human need will lead us to humbly offer the good news to the lost, wholeness to the broken, a restoring touch to the untouchable, justice for the oppressed. Mission involves showing love for those who turn against us, being merciful as God is merciful (Lk 6:32-36).

- *Inclusive and boundary breaking.* As a reconciling community, we proclaim the inclusiveness of God's reign by seeking out and embracing the poor, the excluded and the despised. If Jesus focused his energies around the margins of society, not the center, where should the church in mission be found?

- *Confrontational.* Mission in Jesus' way confronts both the power of the evil one and evil systems of power in our societies. The church is a contrast community. By word, deed and life it offers a prophetic challenge to values and oppressive structures that collide with God's reign.

- *Context-specific and flexible.* We must learn to sing the gospel in new keys. Following Jesus' lead, our manner of both telling and living the good news must be contextualized for particular people and occasions.

- *Empowered by the Spirit, grounded in prayer.* As the Spirit had a central role in Jesus' kingdom mission (see Mt 3:13-4:1; Lk 4:1, 14, 18), so our witness to the gospel through word and life can only be fruitful if it is Spirit-guided and empowered (see Jn 15:26-27; 16:12-15). What's more, Jesus' appeal for his followers to "ask the Lord of the harvest" (Mt 9:38) to advance God's mission reminds us that even our brightest mission strategies will flounder unless we make prayer a priority.

- *Transforming.* Mission in the Jesus way seeks transformation in human hearts and in all of life. Our proclamation of the gospel therefore invites a response of repentance and faith. It results in genuine conversion and incorporation into a community of disciples. At the same time, our embodiment of the kingdom will promote the justice of God's rule in all areas of society. It seeks the shaping, say, of economics, the arts, media, education, politics, technology and worldviews through the presence of God's reign.

– Adapted from chapter three, "Announcing and Embodying God's Reign"