THE GREAT COMMISSION IS FOR CHURCHES, TOO

Posted on October 1, 2019 by Eddie

The focus of Jesus' teaching is on the church, but crucially, the church is on a mission. There is no dichotomy between church and mission because the church that Jesus points to is a missionary church. In other words, the great commission - the command to make disciples - is aimed at our church fellowships, where they are today, not just at missionaries around the globe. Our churches are to be communities where disciples (who make other disciples) are nurtured.

Category: Observations

I've quoted this passage before and no doubt I'll quote it again:

> *'...Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptising 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.â€™ (Mat 28:19,20)*

This, of course, is the famous "great commission" passage from the end of Matthew's Gospel. What isn't always clear in English translations is that in the original Greek, the central command is to "make disciples"; the going, baptising and teaching are all part of that key issue.

It has to be said that mission agencies and missionaries haven't always got to grips with this and have often fallen into one of two equal and opposite errors. A focus on evangelism and counting converts has meant that some mission efforts have not put sufficient effort into training and equipping the new converts, leaving a church which is weak, dependant on the ongoing presence of missionaries and unable to self-reproduce. At the other end of the spectrum, missions which have focussed entirely on social action of one form or another have tended not to see churches planted at all. Of course, these caricatures don't describe all missionaries or all mission work by any means.

Recently, there has been a renewed focus on making disciples in mission circles. It has been realised that it is not sufficient to plant a church among a new people group, but that churches need to be able to grow and to reproduce. In the jargon, churches need to be full of disciples who make disciples. Some mission strategists say that the focus should not be on planting churches, but on promoting disciple-making movements or DMMs.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cmqenWEVPuo

I am aware that there are some criticisms of the DMM strategy (there are criticisms of every mission strategy on the planet). However, those criticisms notwithstanding, I believe that a focus on DMMs is getting us back to the sort of approach to mission which Jesus called us to in the great commission. The focus should be on making disciples and people who are genuine disciples of Jesus will go on to make more disciples.

One of the tragedies of the way that we have tended to envisage mission is that we have seen it as something which happens "out there" (wherever "there" is). We have church and we have mission. Church tends to be rather routine; it's where we have things like Sunday services and such like, whereas missionÂ is a bit edgy and it's where we have DMMs and things like that. OK, I'm caricaturing somewhat, I know that.

However, the thing is that Jesus' teaching does not envisage this sort of dichotomy between church and mission. The focus of Jesus' teaching is on the church, but crucially, the church is on a mission.

There is no dichotomy between church and mission because the church that Jesus points to is a missionary church. In other words, the great commission - the command to make disciples - is aimed at our church fellowships, where they are today, not just at missionaries around the globe. Our churches are to be communities where disciples (who make other disciples) are nurtured. In other words, our churches are to be disciple-making movements.

If the great commission is to be played out in the everyday life of the church fellowship, how well are we doing? Are the structures we have in place, the things we do week by week helping people to grow as disciples or are we missing something? Obviously, there are as many different answers to these questions as there are church fellowships in the country. However, given the trajectory of the faith in the UK, I feel that we can't afford to take things like this for granted. Do we need a rethink of how we go about making disciples? I would say yes.