QUESTIONS 10: ARE WE ALL MISSIONARIES?

Posted on November 13, 2019 by Eddie

Category: Observations

I answered this question in a blog post many moons ago, but the answer that I would give today is slightly different, so I thought it worth revisiting.

Firstly, although the question is one that recurs fairly regularly, I'm not sure that it is entirely helpful. In this series, I've shown that mission is a somewhat nebulous concept. Well, the term missionary is even harder to pin down: you can find my thoughts on that here.

However, if we accept that the term missionary describes, however vaguely, some category of Christian worker, it is clear that we aren't all missionaries. Some people, most people, have normal jobs.

However, if we turn to one of my favourite passages in the New Testament, John 20:21, we read:

> *Again Jesus said, â€œPeace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you.â€*

Jesus sends his followers out into the world - all of them. Jesus does not discriminate between professional sendees and non-professional sendees. We are all sent. In this sense, every Christian is to go out into the wider world, bearing witness to Jesus, being his ambassadors (to use a Pauline term). In a broad use of the term, we are all missionaries.

I said a moment ago that some people have normal jobs. Well, the apostle Paul had a normal job, he made tents, but no one doubts that he was a missionary. Today, we use the term tent-maker to describe someone who deliberately takes up a job in order to support themselves in mission work in another part of the world. This could involve, say, working in the oil industry, while seeking to support a small church plant in a country where it is difficult to be a Christian. I'd like to suggest that all of us, whatever job we do, need to consider ourselves as tent-makers. Both in our jobs and in the wider society, we have a missionary role and our jobs are a vehicle to provide us with the finance we need and to provide us with a forum for our missionary endeavours.

When I say things like this, I often receive a response that I am devaluing world mission. If we say that everyone is a missionary, then it takes a focus off the needs in other parts of the world. I recognise that this is a danger; however, I think that there is a bigger danger lurking that we tend to ignore. In the UK, there are areas where there are virtually no evangelical Christians (or Christians of any other stripe, for that matter). We are living in a missionary situation and we need to recover our missionary vocation. To perpetually insist that mission and missionaries are something that only exist "out there", allows us to ignore the problems staring us in the face.

Whether we all call ourselves missionaries or not, doesn't really matter. However, whether we like it or not, we are living in a missionary situation and we have to respond appropriately. I think that if/when we grasp this, it will have a profound effect on the way that churches operate and the way that we envisage our role in the world as congregations and as individuals.

I realise that some elements of this post might seem to contradict the post on "What is a Missionary". I think that this is inevitable when you are dealing with such nebulous concepts and I apologise to those who like to have things tied up nice and neatly.

Other Posts in This Series:

1. What Is Mission?
2. Why Bother With World Mission When the Needs in the UK are So Great?
3. So You Want To Be A Missionary?
4. What About Short Term Mission Trips?
5. Mission Strategy
6. What on Earth is a Missionary?
7. Why Is Missionary Support So Expensive?
8. Indigenous Missions
9. Mission In the Bible