MISSION IS THEOCENTRIC II

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Category: Observations

The previous post in this series argued that any attempt to define what mission is must start with God himself, because the purpose of mission is ultimately the glory of God. I will admit that there is a degree of circularity in this. Using the purpose of mission in laying the building blocks of a definition of mission wouldn't pass a basic philosophical challenge. Hopefully, this post will start to deal with this inconsistency.

Mission is theocentric, not simply because the glory of God is the purpose of mission, but because God is the prime mover in mission. Actually, God is the prime mover in everything; the universe and all its activities came into being and continue to exist because he maintains them (Acts 17:8).

Scripture tells a connected narrative of a God who is active, continually moving towards his creation and intervening to both guide and shape its forward movement. It is impossible in a blog post to give all of the biblical examples of this process; but I'd like to highlight some which I believe are particularly important to our understanding of mission - however we define it.

God is creator (Genesis 1,2); it is God who kicked the whole thing off. Our universe and the creatures that exist in it only exist because God made them out of nothing.

God involves humanity in his plans from the beginning.

> *Then God said, â€œLet usÂ make mankindÂ in our image,Â in our likeness,so that they may ruleÂ over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky,over the livestock and all the wild animals,and over all the creatures that move along the ground.â€*
>
> *Genesis 1:26*

> *TheÂ LordÂ God took the man and put him in the Garden of EdenÂ to work it and take care of it.*
>
> *Genesis 2:15*

God made heaven and earth, but he placed humanity - his image bearers - in the garden to take care of his creation. There is a degree of collaboration in the process from the start.

God Looks for Fallen Humanity

> *Then the man and his wife heard the sound of theÂ LordÂ God as he was walkingÂ in the garden in the cool of the day, and they hidÂ from theÂ LordÂ God among the trees of the garden.Â But theÂ LordÂ God called to the man, â€œWhere are you?â€*
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> *Genesis 3:8,9*

When humanity rejected God, it was God who took the initiative to seek them out, to provide clothes for them and make them face up to the reality of what they had done.

God Chooses Israel

In Genesis 12, God calls Abram (later Abraham) and tells them that his descendants will be God's own people, through whom all of the people on the earth will be blessed. The rest of the Old Testament (which forms the vast majority of the Bible) tells the story of Abraham's descendants, their repeated unfaithfulness to God and the way in which despite everything, God blessed them and through them the nations of the earth.

God the Son

The pivot around which the Biblical story, and God's engagement with his creation moves is the story of Jesus told in the Gospels. God the Son took on human form, lived, died and rose again. In living the life he lived, Jesus demonstrated what human life could look like. In dying on the cross, he took the punishment due to sinful humanity and in rising again, he demonstrated his victory over the powers that held all of creation in slavery. He initiated the process that will lead to the reconciliation of all things in the new heaven and earth.

Jesus Commissions His Followers

When you write about mission, it is inevitable that you will turn to what is called the great commission in Matthew 28.

> *Then Jesus came to them and said,Â â€œAll authority in heaven and on earth has been*

> *given to me.Â Therefore go and make disciples of all nations,Â baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,Â and teachingÂ them to obey everything I have commanded you.Â*
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> *Matthew 28:18-20*

However, it is important to note that this "commission" does not appear out of nowhere, it is part of a longer process. Jesus had spent three years with his disciples, gathering them together, forming them and equipping them for the role that would be theirs. When he said that they should teach everything that he had commanded, this is building on that three year experience. Acts 1:8 also shows that this commission is dependant on the work of the Holy Spirit in the life of the disciples and this was dramatically demonstrated on the day of Pentecost. The great commission revolves around the teaching of the Son and the power of the Spirit - even here, God is the prime mover.

A New Heaven and a New Earth

> *Then I saw â€œa new heaven and a new earth,â€ for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away,Â and there was no longer any sea.Â I saw the Holy City,Â the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a brideÂ beautifully dressed for her husband.Â And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, â€œLook! Godâ€™s dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them.Â They will be his*
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> *people, and God himself will be with them and be their God.Â Â â€˜He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more deathâ€™ or mourning or crying or pain,Â for the old order of things has passed away.â€*
>
> *He who was seated on the throneÂ said, â€œI am making everything new!â€ Then he said, â€œWrite this down, for these words are trustworthy and true.â€*
>
> *Revelation 21:1-5*

The final scene of the Bible pictures the recreation of all things. God will renew creation and will dwell with his creatures in the way that was originally envisaged in Genesis 1. History finds its climax in God and his creation finally being united. The rest of the New Testament makes it clear that this is only possible through the death of Jesus on the cross (for example, Col. 1:20).

In passing, it is worth noting that John was commanded to "Write this down". One key feature

through the whole story of the Bible is the actual production of the Bible. God did not just act through history, he inspired the story to be written down so that future generations could learn and understand what was going on.

I've chosen these incidents because I will return to them later in the series. However, in closing, I'd just like to summarise. Through the whole series, we see the Triune God taking the initiative at every stage. However, at key points he also involves humanity directly in the story. Throughout Scripture, God drives things on, but in the process he places a lot of responsibility into the hands of men and women. This is, perhaps, the key point that we have to grasp if we want to understand mission.