MISSION: START WITH GOD

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Category: Bible & Mission

The rationale behind Christian mission is not that we have a task to complete, nor even the needs of people who don't know Christ. God, his character and interaction with humanity should be the starting point of any consideration of 'the why' of mission.

A few days ago, I posted a sketch which captured my approach to missional theology - it is reproduced above. Over the next few weeks, I'm going to try and unpack this in little chunks.

For me, the starting place for mission must always be God. I've covered this in a number of blog posts already (The Missional Nature of God, Mission is God's Activity) as well as in a redacted paper from a Wycliffe discussion forum. However, I'd like to just flesh this out a little by explaining why I don't believe that 'our task' or the 'needs of the unreached' are an adequate basis for our thinking about mission.

The Task; there is a lot written about the missionary task, fulfilling the Great Commission or one of a number of other ways of saying more or less the same thing. However, a focus on activity leads to all sorts of unanswered questions about what exactly is the task? How do we prioritise evangelism over social action? ... And the list goes on. It isn't that these questions are not important, they are - but when we start by thinking about our activity, we have no objective way of evaluating the activity.

The Need; exactly the same problem arises when we use the 'needs of the nations' as our starting point. If we start with people and their needs, we will be constantly forced to ask which people and which needs should be prioritised. Once again, these are important issues, but if people are our starting point, we have no way of answering questions about people's needs. (See this post for more reflection on this question.)

Another problem with putting our work or people's needs at the forefront of our missional reflection is that it centres things around people; rather than around God. Our mission theology and reflection needs to be theocentric, not anthropocentric.

So, our starting point for reflecting on mission must be the Triune God and his relationship to humanity and his creation. Our work finds its meaning and direction in his work and our response to human need echoes the way in which he deals with people in love and self sacrifice.