IT'S NOT ABOUT YOU

Posted on November 13, 2014 by Eddie

Getting involved in Christian work overseas is a huge step. It takes a lot of prayerful discussion with friends, advisors and church-leaders and most of the time the focus is on you and what you will eventually be doing. In one sense, there is nothing wrong with this, but it is a bad place to start. Mission is not all about missionaries and what they do, it is about God and how he has been at work through history to bring us to the point where we are today.
Category: Observations

Over the next few weeks, I'm going to be publishing a series of blog postsÂ which are aimed at people who are considering a career in mission work somewhere around the world. I hope that the series will eventually be combined into a booklet, or at least an ebook, which can be made more widely available.

It's Not About You

Getting involved in Christian work overseas is a huge step. Where should you go? Who should you go with? What training will you need? What language(s) will you have to learn? Where will your money come from? It takes a lot of prayerful discussion with friends, advisors and church-leaders to work through these questions and most of the time the focus is on you and what you will eventually be doing.Â In one sense, there is nothing wrong with this; these questions have to be answered (and we will look at all of them and more later in this series), but it is a bad place to start. Mission is not all about missionaries and what they do, it is about God and how he has been at work through history to bring us to the point where we are today.

God created a good world and placed human beings in it to care for the world and, by bearing his image, to reflect God's nature to the whole of creation. However, humanity failed in its God-given role by rebelling against God, fracturing the relationships between God, humankind and the wider creation.

Since that time, God has been on a mission to restore that which was lost in Eden; to reconcile all things to himself.

The first major step that God took, was toÂ choose a nation, Israel, to be his people, to represent him to the world and to show his goodness to all the nations. God didn't choose Israel because they were special in any way, he chose them in order to give them a responsibility. He blessed them so that they can bless the world.

At this point, it is normal to say that Israel failed in their task; but that isn't quite true. Yes, the way that Israel followed God was far from perfect and eventually the nation was divided and was exiled because of their unfaithfulness. However, we can't overlook two high spots which echo down through history.

- Israel gave us the Old Testament. It was Jewish scribes who sat down and wrote the books that make up the majority of the Bible. Because of them, we have a record of God at work through thousands of years and we can marvel at the picture of God that is painted in the Psalms and elsewhere.
- More importantly, the story of Israel is brought to a climax in Jesus. God took on human form and lived in Israel as a first century Jew, drawing the threads of their history together in one monumental event.

God the Father sent Jesus into the world with a twofold purpose. He was to gather in the nation of Israel, teach them and train them and then send them out in the world with the message of God's reconciling love. Secondly he came to die, to take the punishment that humanity deserved for rejecting God and to defeat the powers of death and darkness.

Looking at it, God's work seems to have been derailed numerous times. Adam and Eve disobeyed God in the garden, Israel wasn't very faithful and eventually went right off the rails and Jesus was crucified and buried. However, none of these setbacks were unforeseen or unplanned and none of them could stop God's work going forward.

On the third day, Jesus rose from the grave by the power of God's Spirit, ushering in a new age in which God's reconciling rule over creation would be gradually revealed. Before ascending to heaven, Jesus sent out his followers, the Israel he had gathered together, and sent them out into the world to make disciples wherever they found themselves. The key difference between this new Israel and the old one, is that Jesus followers and all Christians since them, have God's Spirit living inside them. The same Spirit that brought Jesus from the dead animates the life of his disciples. We aren't perfect, not until God's work is finally complete, but we are empowered to follow God more effectively.

Two thousand years later, Jesus disciples, empowered by the Spirit have taken his message to every corner of the world. God is at work in the life of his people and there are now Christians in every nation on the planet.

God has been at work since creation, through the nation of Israel and on into the life of the church. He has worked through an uncounted number of individuals and communities to bring us to this point in history. As you consider getting involved in mission work, you are looking at joining the biggest and most successful movement of human beings in the whole of history.

Implications for You

- The most important question that you need to answer is not what it is that you can do for God, but how can you join in with what God is already doing in the world. This means that you do need to spend some serious term reading and researching about the part of the world, or the type of work that you are interested in.
- God doesn't *need* you! His mission has gone ahead for thousands of years without your involvement and if you don't get involved in mission world, things won't grind to a halt. However, God does *want* you. God doesn't want to move his work ahead without us being involved. He loves us so much that he desperately wants us to be involved despite all of our failures.
- You will be on the winning side. Mission work can be hard and it can be discouraging. In the short-term, it can seem to go nowhere, but Christ is building his church and the gates of hell

will not stand against it.