

Every Member a Missionary!

Acts 11:19-30

Introduction

“All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe everything I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.” (Matthew 28:19-20, HCSB)

“It is not for you to know the times or periods that the Father has set by His own authority. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come on you, and you will be My witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.” (Acts 1:8, HCSB)

These are the final words of Jesus. He said them to His disciples after He was resurrected and before He ascended into heaven. With these timeless words Jesus communicated a mission. The mission is to help other people become His disciples by being a witness to whom He is and all that He has done.

These are the final words of Jesus. With these timeless words Jesus commissioned missionaries. Obviously, those who were physically present were commissioned and they obeyed. Soon, Peter would be preaching a powerful gospel sermon through which 3000 souls would express faith in Jesus and become His disciples. Soon, believers would scatter all over the known world because of persecution for their faith in Christ. As they traveled and settled in various places they made it their aim to testify to their new neighbors and friends about who Jesus was and what He had done.

These are the final words of Jesus. Not only did Jesus speak these final words to those who were physically present, He speaks them to us today. With these words Jesus Christ calls you and me to a mission. With these words Jesus calls you and me to be His missionaries.

What does it mean to be a missionary? What does the life of a missionary look like? What exactly does a missionary do? For some, being a missionary may mean obeying God’s call to live in a different place among different people for the purpose of sharing God’s plan of redemption. For others, being a missionary may mean planting

yourself in a familiar place with familiar people for the purpose of sharing God's plan of redemption. All of God's missionaries are not called to far away, exotic, dangerous places to live-out the mission. But, all of God's missionaries are called to someplace to live-out the mission. Every member of the body of Christ is a missionary!

Advance the Kingdom

As God's missionary I must advance God's Kingdom. *"Those who had been scattered as a result of the persecution that started because of Stephen made their way as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus, and Antioch, speaking the message to no one except Jews. But there were some of them, Cypriot and Cyrenian men, who came to Antioch and began speaking to the Hellenists, proclaiming the good news about the Lord Jesus. The Lord's hand was with them, and a large number who believed turned to the Lord."* (Acts 11:19-21)

Notice that these early disciples of Jesus Christ were living out the mission that Jesus had given them. They did not allow the persecution that drove them from their hometown to deter them from doing their part to advance the Kingdom of God. In fact, it appears that the persecution that scattered them actually served to accelerate the spread of the gospel and the growth of the Kingdom!

I am afraid that most modern day members of God's Kingdom are not doing anything to advance the Kingdom. Persecution is not our problem. Instead, we are distracted. Some of us are distracted by the pursuit of prestige. Many of us are distracted by the pursuit of prosperity. All of us are distracted by the pursuit of pleasure. In the process of these pursuits we lose sight of the fact that we are a part of something that is much bigger than ourselves. We are a part of the Kingdom of God and our mission is to advance it.

Provide Encouragement

"Then the report about them was heard by the church that was at Jerusalem, and they sent out Barnabas to travel as far as Antioch. When he arrived and saw the grace of God, he was glad and encouraged all of them to remain true to the Lord with a firm resolve of the heart, for he was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and of faith. And large numbers were added to the Lord." (Acts 11:22-24)

Notice the power of a little encouragement. When Barnabas arrived to find that God was truly working among the people he greased the wheels with a little encouragement. When he did that they must have started working even harder because the Bible says that "...large numbers were added to the Lord."

Illustration 65: Church Begins with Thank You, pg. 44 in 1001.

Who have you encouraged today? Thank your Sunday School teacher for taking the time to prepare and teach the lesson. Send a note or an email to someone who is rarely noticed for her service. Invite a young couple out to lunch, pay for it, and begin building a relationship with them. Slow down and visit with some of our senior adults; pray with him and ask him to pray for you. Get down on his level and talk to one of these little boys or girls for a few minutes.

Today, we all have an opportunity to be a "Barnabas". We can encourage missionaries and church planters in North American by giving a gift to the Annie Armstrong Easter Offering for North American Missions. Many of our missionaries are wondering if they are going to be able to stay on the mission field next year because less and less money is coming in each year. Let's encourage them by giving a gift that says we haven't forgotten about you and we support what you are doing in the name of Jesus!

Remain Teachable

"Then he went to Tarsus to search for Saul, and when he found him he brought him to Antioch. For a whole year they met with the church and taught large numbers. The disciples were first called Christians at Antioch." (Acts 11:25-26)

The believers at Antioch needed to learn and grow in their new faith. They had some of the best teachers anyone could ask for. They sat under the teaching of Paul the apostle for one year. Their spiritual growth became so evident to those around them that they started calling them Christians which means "little Christ". They were learning about Christ and they were living like Christ!

A Christian who really wants to be a missionary for Jesus must be teachable. I read a statement this week that said, "We die if we stop learning, stop growing, stop challenging ourselves." I believe that is especially true for the Christian. Times and seasons change. God may want to do something with you at this season of your life that you have never done before. I have pastor friends who were called by God later in life.

They had families, careers, and were established lay leaders in their churches and God changed the direction they thought their lives were taking. The only way they were able to know what God wanted them to do was by being open and teachable. We love to say that “you can’t teach an old dog new trick”. To that I say I can’t, but God can.

Be Ready for Life’s Transitions

“In those days some prophets came down from Jerusalem to Antioch. Then one of them, named Agabus, stood up and predicted by the Spirit that there would be a severe famine throughout the Roman world. This took place during the time of Claudius. So each of the disciples, according to his ability, determined to send relief to the brothers who lived in Judea. They did this, sending it to the elders by means of Barnabas and Saul.” (Acts 11:27-30)

The church at Antioch lived out the mission by rolling with the punches. A famine in the ancient world was devastating. We hear about a famine in a third world country and we may be moved to pray and send a little money but it doesn’t really affect us because we don’t know anyone who is starving. However, these Christians knew people who would starve to death if they didn’t step up and help out. So, they lived out their faith and mission by doing what they could to meet the needs of others.

Life is full of transitions. Most of the 1990’s and the early part of the last decade was a time of economic growth and prosperity. Now, we are in a less prosperous time. People are without jobs. Some can’t afford to feed their families. I don’t know when it will get better. Will we live out the mission by meeting the needs? This challenging economic season that we are in may provide us with very unique opportunities to advance the Kingdom of God by not just giving a verbal gospel witness but by giving a visual gospel witness.

Conclusion

To be a missionary for the Lord Jesus Christ means much more than simply hearing and receiving this message. It hinges upon you and me living out this message.