



## Introduction

- Define and/or give characteristics of these three things: a task, a job, and a mission.

<i>Task</i>	<i>Job</i>	<i>Mission</i>

- Why is it important you keep those straight? What would happen if you thought of a task or a job as a mission? What would happen if you thought of a mission as a task?

It is important that congregations are clear about their mission. A mission provides the *raison d'être*, the “reason for existence”.

An organization might have many important tasks and jobs. It might also not do all those tasks or jobs well. It might even let some of those important tasks and jobs slip through the cracks. While that is not good, the organization can still have a reason to exist. That is not the case if an organization fails to carry out its mission. If an organization does not carry out its mission, it could cease to exist and no one would be hurt.

So it is with congregations. There are many tasks and jobs in the Church. A congregation might not do them all well. While that is not good, the congregation that does not do all things well can still have a reason for existing. However, if a congregation does not carry out its mission, then there is no reason for that congregation to exist anymore. It could disappear without consequence.

In this Bible study, we will look at the Biblical concept of *mission*. We will examine key Bible passages that speak to the mission of the Church. Finally, we will see how that mission was fulfilled in the early Christian church.

## PART 1 - THE CONCEPT OF "MISSION" IN SCRIPTURE

### A mission is given from above

*Joshua 22:3*

*For a long time now—to this very day—you have not deserted your fellow Israelites but have carried out the mission the LORD your God gave you.*

*1 Samuel 15:17-18*

*Samuel said, "Although you were once small in your own eyes, did you not become the head of the tribes of Israel? The Lord anointed you king over Israel. And he sent you on a mission, saying, 'Go and completely destroy those wicked people, the Amalekites; wage war against them until you have wiped them out.'"*

*Acts 12:25*

*When Barnabas and Saul had finished their mission, they returned from Jerusalem, taking with them John, also called Mark.*

*Acts 20:24*

*Paul said, "I consider my life worth nothing to me. My only aim is to finish the race and complete the task the Lord Jesus has given me — the task of testifying to the good news of God's grace."*

Scripture uses different words to capture the concept of *mission*.

In Joshua 22, Joshua is talking to warriors from the tribes of Reuben, Gad, and Manasseh. These tribes settled east of the Jordan River, but they had spent years helping their brother Israelite tribes capture land west of the river. Joshua tells them that they have now fulfilled their mission. The Hebrew word there is a form of *mishmereth*, which is translated a variety of ways: charge, duty, obligation.

In 1 Samuel 15, Samuel reminds King Saul that he had a mission to prevent Israel from falling under pagan influence. Samuel uses a form of the Hebrew word *derek*, which can be translated as "way" or "road" or "journey."

In Acts 12, we read that Barnabas and Saul (not yet renamed "Paul") were on a mission trip. The word used there for mission is a form of the Greek word *diakonia*, which means "service" or "ministry." It is the same word Paul uses in Acts 20, translated "task."

So, we find the concept of "mission" connected with a variety of activities: driving pagans out of a land through war, sharing the gospel in foreign lands, etc. We also see that different words are used to describe what we would call a mission. Sometimes that word stresses the sense of duty in a mission. Other times, the word stresses the adventure and journey that a mission can often be.

- However, what is the one constant we see in all those passages?

*Psalm 119:73*

*Your hands made me and formed me.*

*Matthew 16:18*

*Jesus said, "...On this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it."*

- Why does it make sense that a mission would come from God... not from the will of the individual... not from the will of the congregation?
- Individuals often have strong feelings about what they think their congregation should be doing. If others disagree, it can lead to strife. This is contrary to God's will. St. Paul writes, "Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace" (Ephesians 4:3). How would having a clear and correct sense of the Church's mission help promote peace?

## **A mission statement focuses on the heart of the matter**

- In 60 seconds, list as many miracles of Jesus as you can.
- Looking at that list, would you call any of those Jesus' mission?

*Luke 19:10*

*Jesus said, "The Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost."*

*Mark 10:45*

*Jesus said, "The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."*

- When Jesus states his mission, how does he describe it?
- Jesus did not heal the sick or feed the 5,000 or cast out demons because those things were his mission. They were not. They *served* his mission. How?
- It is absolutely vital that a congregation distinguish between their God-given mission and good and noble tasks that may serve that mission. Why?

## PART 2 - THE MISSION CHRIST HAS GIVEN TO THE CHURCH

If you read the gospels, you find that there are dozens of things Jesus encouraged believers to do. However, there are four places in Scripture that receive special attention because of *when* Jesus gives instructions to his followers—right before he ascended. In every instance, he is speaking to a group—his disciples—not an individual. Since he is speaking to his disciples, the leaders of the early church, and since the timing would seem to give his words special *gravitas*, these instructions are sometimes known as the Great Commission.

Let us look at the four Great Commission passages. As we do, complete the chart on page 5, noting:

1. what specifically Jesus asks his followers to do,
2. towards whom Jesus asks his followers to direct their mission efforts,
3. how Jesus tells his followers to carry out that mission, and
4. where Jesus' followers are to carry out their mission.

### ***Matthew 28:18-20***

*Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."*

### ***Mark 16:15-16***

*[Jesus] said to them, "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation. Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned."*

### ***Luke 24:46-48***

*[Jesus] told them, "This is what is written: The Messiah will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, and repentance for the forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things."*

### ***Acts 1:8***

*Jesus said, "You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."*

**THE GREAT COMMISSION**

<i>Scripture passage</i>	<i>What is the mission?</i>	<i>Who is the target of this mission?</i>	<i>How is this mission carried out?</i>	<i>Where is this mission carried out?</i>
Matthew 28:18-20				
Mark 16:15				
Luke 24:46-48				
Acts 1:8				

- In five or six words, synthesize the mission as laid out in those four scriptures. What does Jesus say is the reason for the Church to exist?
- Obviously, the Great Commission passages put a heavy emphasis on reaching out to the lost with the gospel. However, the lost are not the only recipients of the Church's ministry. What are some words or phrases that demonstrate that the Great Commission calls us to minister to believers as well?
- Look closely at the "how" column. That column calls for us to baptize and teach God's Word. It also says we are to make disciples with power. How are those concepts related? (See Romans 1:16 if you need help.)
- Someone says to you, "The mission of the Church is to have beautiful worship with good sermons and hymns." Respond.
- Someone says to you, "The mission of the Church is to offer Christian education for youth so that they might grow closer to Jesus." Respond.
- Someone says to you, "The mission of the Church is to care for the poor and the sick, reflecting Christ's love." Respond.
- Scripture says our mission should take place "in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." List some things that might mean for an individual congregation.

## PART 3 - CHRIST'S MISSION CARRIED OUT IN THE EARLY CHURCH

Acts 2:42-47

*42 They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. 43 Everyone was filled with awe at the many wonders and signs performed by the apostles. 44 All the believers were together and had everything in common. 45 They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need. 46 Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, 47 praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.*

- Where in those passages do you see explicit mention of the early church following the “how” part of the Great Commission passages?
- What were some of the results of the early church carrying out the Great Commission?
- Someone says, “Clearly, Acts 2:43 teaches us that doing signs and wonders is part of the mission of the true Church!” Respond.
- Living in a loving community was a fruit of the early church’s focus on their mission. As believers grew in their knowledge of the apostles’ teaching and the sacrifice Christ had made for them, it moved them to make radical sacrifices for others. Historians have noted that opponents of the early church attributed much of the church’s growth to the profound love that Christians demonstrated for each other and even for strangers. Emperor Julian ruled from 361AD to 363AD. He was known as “Julian, the Apostate” for his opposition to Christianity. He once wrote, “Atheism [i.e. what he called the Christian faith!] has been specially advanced through the loving services rendered to strangers... It is a scandal that there is not a single Jew [i.e. a Christian convert] who is a beggar, and that the godless Galileans care not only for their own poor but for ours as well; while those who belong to us look in vain for the help that we should render them.” What, if anything, does this say about our effort to carry our Christ’s mission?

Immediately after his ascension, Jesus’ followers begin to carry out the Great Commission. They proclaimed the Gospel to anyone who would listen. They nurtured their faith with regular contact with God’s Word and apostolic teaching. They used the sacraments.

The part of the Great Commission that *wasn’t* being carried out yet was the “where.” Up to this point, the mission is only being fulfilled in Jerusalem. But a persecution broke out, which God used to advance his mission.

*Acts 8:1,4*

*On that day a great persecution broke out against the church in Jerusalem, and all except the apostles were scattered throughout Judea and Samaria... Those who had been scattered preached the word wherever they went.*

- The early church is scattered. What happens? What does this tell you about Jesus' mission for the Church?

*2 Corinthians 5:14-21*

*<sup>14</sup>For Christ's love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died. <sup>15</sup>And he died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again.*

*<sup>16</sup>So from now on we regard no one from a worldly point of view. Though we once regarded Christ in this way, we do so no longer. <sup>17</sup>Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here! <sup>18</sup>All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: <sup>19</sup>that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting people's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. <sup>20</sup>We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God. <sup>21</sup>God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.*

- 2 Corinthians 5 is a beautiful summary of the respective missions of Christ and his church. What is Christ's mission?
  
- What is our mission?
  
- Paul says, "[Christ] has committed us to the message of reconciliation." What does that word "committed" imply to you? In what ways are we "committed"?



## **For further discussion**

- a) Someone says, “There is no need for a congregation to have a mission statement. Scripture tells us what our mission is, so there is no need for us to restate it.” Do you agree or disagree? Give the reason for your answer.
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- b) How might a mission statement help with planning and decision making within a congregation?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- c) List some things that would *have* to be part of a congregational mission statement for it to be of value.
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- d) List some things that you probably would *not* want to put in a congregational mission statement.