

WHAT IS GOD'S MISSION FOR HIS CHURCH?

Matthew 22:35-40; 28:19-20

Critical Searching Inquiries Series

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As we continue our focus today on “Critical Searching Inquiries (CSI)” we will look at the question, “What is God’s Mission For His Church?” And as we do I will lift up two major mission commands and directives which I believe Jesus set forth for his church.

These mission commands and directives are found in what we Biblically call Jesus’ Great Commandment and his Great Commission. They are, I believe, Jesus’ marching orders and foundational purpose for his church.

You may remember the story in Matthew 22:35-40 of how the expert in the law asked Jesus, “*Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the law?*” The reply Jesus made is amazing: “*Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment.*”

“*And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.*” In other words, if we could ever perfectly follow these two commandments all the other teachings and laws in the Bible would not be needed.

Then Jesus’ Great Commission, of course, is found in Matthew 28:19-20, “*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 close of the age.*”

Jesus’ Great Commandment and Great Commission state very clearly what God’s purpose and mission is for his church, and for followers of Christ like you and me. In fact, they aren’t something we can debate, or vote on, or try to put other missions or purposes in front of.

For Jesus didn’t say, “If you can find the time in your busy schedule, or don’t have more important things to do, I hope you will try to worship and love God. And if it isn’t too difficult, or will get in the way of your personal priorities, I hope you will try to love at least certain people as best you can.”

No Jesus commands, “*Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind,*” and “*Love your neighbor as yourself.*” Yes, we in our human and sinful nature will never be able to do this perfectly. And yet Jesus commands us to put our love for him and for our neighbor as our number one priority.

Jesus also makes it very plain to his church and to his followers to “go” and make disciples of people everywhere. Again he doesn’t say, “If it’s not too difficult, or if you happen to find some time, or if the people and needs in your church are first taken care of then please try to reach out and make a disciple if you can.”

No, Jesus makes it very clear that the marching orders and the purpose of his church is to go. It is to go and witness to people so they may come to know and believe in Jesus as their Lord and Savior. It is to go and baptize people of all ages into a dynamic faith in him.

It is to go and teach Jesus' word of truth so that people in the church are equipped to love God above all things, to love their neighbors as themselves and to go, and witness, and bring others to faith in Christ. It is a process where new believing Christians are created and where the worship, and love for God, and for our neighbors grows stronger each day.

So I believe that it is very clear in Jesus' own words in the Bible that his Great Commandment and Great Commission are the mission, and purpose, God has for his church. And I believe that Messiah's Mission Statement, "To Proclaim the Gospel of Christ; Prepare our members for outreach and service; Accept all people and minister to their human needs," is centered in and supports Jesus' mission.

All our major decisions as a congregation these past years have been centered in this mission. We offer variety in worship in order to go and reach more people. We added a Projection System where our worship is easier to follow for all ages and where we can use more worship resources like sermon outlines, pictures, videos and helpful graphics.

We have made positive steps as a congregation to empower people to go and love their neighbor through Stephen Ministry, the Hoffman-Kensington Food Shelf, and through our support of TeacHaiti and the Malaria Project.

Our purpose in having this beautiful sanctuary space is so that we can worship God with all our heart, soul, and mind. Our kitchen and education wing's purpose is so we can serve more people in our community and area, and can baptize and teach more people through small groups, and in and through children's and youth activities.

We need to always keep evaluating, and studying, everything we do here at Messiah to see if it is firmly centered in Jesus' mission. Be assured that Messiah's Council and committees are committed to keeping our congregation firmly grounded in Christ. We need to always remember that this is his church and we are his people.

One of the sad realities of our present time is that there are more and more churches, and church people, who are forgetting this central Biblical message. The result is that many churches today are floundering or are focusing on secondary goals rather than the main thing.

For example, to center one's mission on simply trying to make the members comfortable or to keep a few people happy often leads to a dysfunctional church. To center one's mission on trying to be all things to all people often leads to a church without a real heart and soul.

To have Jesus and the freedom to worship him without restrictions, as well as a passion to reach out to those who are far away from God, brings a Holy Spirit power to a church. It motivates a church because they know that as long as there are people who don't know Jesus by faith, their work and mission is not complete.

And realizing the scope of this challenge, they know that it is only through prayer and the personal commitment to Christ of each person that they will ever be able to do this mission. A church congregation centered on Christ's mission realizes that they cannot do it themselves, so they rely completely on prayer and on God leading them.

Another way that churches often flounder in their mission is when they emphasize one part of Jesus' Great Commandment too much, or when they forget about or reinterpret the meaning of

Jesus' Great Commission. In other words, it is easy to get so focused on one thing that we neglect the other.

For example there are some churches who put so much emphasis on worshipping and praising God, on having a personal relationship with Jesus that they may have neglected the poor, or caring for those facing injustice, or loving the person who may live differently than they do.

On the other hand there are churches who only are involved in social justice issues, or who focus most of their efforts on supporting certain political or social issues. Some of these churches the emphasis is not on how to have a personal relationship with Jesus or how to tell others about him, but more on the God who judges us if we don't agree with their perspectives.

And then there are churches today who reinterpret or water down Jesus' Great Commission. There are some who may be so centered and focused on reaching people for Jesus that they neglect how important it is to first love people, and listen to them, before witnessing.

And then there are those who say that Jesus is just one of many prophets and ways to God, and that they believe that the church should not be witnessing to people of others faiths, and should not be seeking to make disciples for Jesus of all people. This is very popular today.

The reality, however, is that without a Great Commandment and Great Commission mindset the church can easily become simply a "holier than thou" clique, or simply a social service agency. It can easily become an organization that is Christian in mostly name only where they really don't believe the Bible is true, or don't believe it is God's inspired revelation to us.

I believe with all my heart that the Bible is God's inspired truth for us and that Jesus has one central purpose for his church. I believe that Jesus commands us to love and worship him more and more each day—to love him with all our heart, soul, and mind.

I also believe that Jesus commands us to love our neighbor as we love ourselves. He commands our church to put our love and worship for him into action by loving others. He commands us to be growing in our care and love for others, and in our hands-on and financial support of missions, and outreach to the poor and needy.

And I believe with all my heart that Jesus commands and commissions us as a church to go make disciples. For I firmly believe that it is only when people come to know Jesus in a real and personal way that their lives have real meaning and purpose. I firmly believe that Jesus, and our ministry for him, changes lives and hearts in many amazing ways.

May God richly bless and empower our congregation at Messiah to be fully committed and grounded in God's mission. Please join me in praying that Christ's mission will lead us forth this coming year in many miraculous ways.