

Proclamation/Word-Centered Evangelism and Missions

Introduction

Last time, we briefly examined the “social action” plank of the new evangelical movement. We saw that it emphasizes that missions is more than simply proclamation of the gospel, but rather is evangelism *and* social responsibility. It includes, they suggest, “redemption of the world in all its aspects.”¹

With these notes, I would like to build the case that the work of missions centers on the proclamation of the Word of God. This is emphasized not only in the ministry of Jesus Christ, but also that of Paul, the quintessential missionary.

1. Great Commission Texts

- A. Mark 16:15. “Preach the gospel to every creature.”
- B. Luke 24:47. “Repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations.”
- C. Acts 1:8. The apostles “shall be witnesses [to Jesus] both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth.”

2. Other Texts in the Gospels and Acts

- A. Luke 4:43. Jesus’ purpose was to preach the kingdom of God. Though this is not precisely what we preach today, it is clear that if we are to model Jesus’ ministry at all, we need to preach the gospel. See also the following verses that emphasize the place of preaching during the ministry of Christ: Matt 4:17, 10:7, 10:27, 11:1, Mark 1:4, 1:38, 3:14, Luke 4:18-19, 9:2, 9:60.
- B. John 15:27. Here the phrase is “bear witness.” This is done with the help of the Holy Spirit.
- C. Luke 5:1, Acts 13:7, 44. The people were eager to hear the Word of God.
- D. John 17:4-6, 8, 20. Christ glorified God in His earthly life, and that consisted of doing what God wanted him to do (v. 4). What God wanted Him to do was to manifest His name to the disciples (v. 6). The disciples had received the words of Christ and then others would believe on Christ through their word.
- E. Acts 5:42, 6:1-7, 8:25. Preaching was central to the work of the apostles.
- F. Acts 6:7, 12:24, 13:49, 19:20. The spread of the Word is a central theme in Acts.
- G. Acts 10:42. The apostles were being obedient to the command of Christ to preach that Christ is ordained to be the Judge, and that believing on Him brings remission of sins.
- H. Acts 13:5, 46, 15:35-6, 16:10, 16:32, 18:11, 19:10. Preaching was the central activity of Paul’s mission trips. In Acts 16:6-7 the Holy Spirit forbade the apostle to do this in certain areas. That was obviously the focus of Paul’s ministry.
- I. Acts 8:14, 11:1, 13:48. The endpoint of missions is the reception of the Word of God in the hearers.

¹ See David M. Doran, *For the Sake of His Name*, Allen Park, MI: Student Global Impact, 2002, especially chapter 5.

- J. Acts 6:4, 14:15, 15:35, 18:5, 28:31. In Acts, much emphasis is laid on the preaching of the Word.
- K. Acts 4:31. Boldness in speaking the Word.
- L. Acts 17:13. Preaching of the word was the occasion for opposition. See also Rev. 20:4.

3. Epistolary Literature

- A. Rom. 10:13-17. The hearing of the Word of God is necessary for salvation.
- B. Rom. 15:20. Paul's particular calling was to preach the gospel in areas where Christ was not yet known. This is to be balanced with 1:15 where there were believers yet Paul wanted to preach to them as well.
- C. 1 Cor. 1:17-2:5, e.g. 1:17, 23. The contrast of the message of the cross with the "wisdom" of the world. The point here is that, no matter how foolish it seems to the world, Paul's mission is to proclaim that message.
- D. 1 Cor. 9:16. Paul was ordered by God to preach the gospel. That is what "necessity is laid upon me" means.
- E. 2 Cor. 2:12. Paul came to Troas in order to preach the gospel.
- F. 2 Cor. 10:15-16. Paul came to Corinth with the gospel and intended to proclaim it in the surrounding regions.
- G. Gal. 1:8-9. The preaching of any other kind of gospel is anathema.
- H. Gal. 1:16, 2:2, Eph. 3:8, Col. 1:28-29. Preaching the word is Paul's great aim in life.
- I. 1 Thess. 1:5-8. The Word of God came to them, was received, and then they propagated the Word themselves.
- J. 1 Thess. 2:13. Paul's thankfulness at the reception of the Word of God.
- K. 2 Thess 3:1. Paul's prayer request for the word of the Lord to have free course, i.e. be able to run to its destination.
- L. Spirit's aid for witnessing – 3:34, 15:26-27, 16:7-11, Luke 24:47-49, Acts 1:8.
- M. 1 Peter 1:23. The Word of God is the "begetting agent" of our new life.

Conclusion

As we pointed out earlier, there are major flaws with the view that Christians are to do just what Jesus did as part of their missionary work or "incarnation" in the world. First, the incarnation is a one-time only event related to the humanity of Christ. Second, Christ did miracles which we cannot do. In these notes we have seen that instead, the missionary mandate of the Bible is to preach the Word of God. We are not putting ourselves out there for everyone to see (as in the lifestyle evangelism movement) but rather putting Christ and His word out. Certainly we are to "adorn the doctrine of God our Saviour in all things" (Titus 2:10), but that is not to be at the expense of leaving out the doctrine which needs to be adorned!