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Missiology

Lesson 22 – The Methods and Tools of a Missionary

The methods and tools of a missionary may change from one place to another, and from one era in history to another. But it can be helpful to take a close look at the methods and tools other Christian missionaries have used in the past. No doubt we can learn something from them.

How did Jesus go about His work of preaching the Gospel? We know He used the Jewish synagogues where the Jews gathered for worship on the Sabbath. Much of His teaching was done in these synagogues and in the Temple at Jerusalem. But He also walked from town to town, teaching His followers as He went. Crowds gathered to hear His teaching on hillsides or by the seashore or in deserted areas. Since He was the promised Messiah, His teaching ministry was combined with a healing ministry, as the prophets of old had foretold. Jesus accepted invitations to the homes of tax collectors as well as Pharisees. He was willing to debate with His accusers and answer their questions. But, for the most part, He restricted His preaching and healing ministry to His own people, the Israelites, to whom the promises of the Messiah had been given.

Jesus also gave on-the job training to a small number of disciples (followers). He chose some of them to be His apostles, and He gave special instruction to them. Jesus at one point sent His twelve apostles to carry out a ministry similar to His own, giving them authority to preach and teach and also do miracles in His name. On another occasion He sent out seventy (or seventy-two) disciples to announce the Gospel and heal the sick in areas that He was planning to visit in the near future. These instructions are not specifically addressed to us today, and yet there is much we can learn from what Jesus said to those he sent out.

We read in Matthew 10:1: **“When He had called His twelve disciples to Him, He gave them power over unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to heal all kinds of sickness and all kinds of disease.”** Luke reports the same thing: **“He called His twelve disciples together and gave them power and authority over all demons, and to cure diseases. He sent them to preach the kingdom of God and to heal the sick”** (Luke 9:1-2). These men were chosen as His apostles, and this included Judas Iscariot, who later betrayed Him. At that time Jesus stressed that they were to be healers to call attention to the divine power of their Master to heal any disease, even to the point of raising the dead. Jesus said to them: **“Heal the sick, cleanse the lepers, raise the dead, cast out demons”** (Matthew 10:8). No doubt there would have been many who would have been willing to pay them a great sum for such cures. But Jesus told them: **“Freely you have received, freely give”** (Matthew 10:8). The idea that

preachers and missionaries should become financially wealthy through their labors does not come from Christ.

Moreover, Jesus instructed them: **“Do not go into the way of the Gentiles, and do not enter a city of the Samaritans. But go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel”** (Matthew 10:5-6). These words no longer apply to us, for we are to go into all the world and proclaim God’s Word to all, as Jesus later commanded all His disciples.

Their message was this: **“The kingdom of heaven is at hand”** (Matthew 10:7). They were to call attention to Jesus as the King whom God had sent to establish His kingdom. Their message was to be Christ-centered.

Those whom Jesus sent were not to take many possessions or demand special favors. But they could expect their hearers to provide for their daily earthly needs. Jesus said: **“A worker is worthy of his food”** (Matthew 10:10).

When they would enter a village, they would find a place to stay. They should not go shopping around for better accommodations elsewhere but stay at the house that first welcomed them. If a village refused to listen to them or rejected their message, they were to go to another village, but not before warning the people of the seriousness of their actions: **“Whoever will not receive you nor hear your words, when you depart from that house or city, shake off the dust from your feet. Assuredly, I say to you, it will be more tolerable for the land of Sodom and Gomorrah in the day of judgment than for that city!”** (Matthew 10:14-15). A visit from God through His messengers is a momentous occasion for any city. Jesus told them: **“He who receives you receives Me, and he who receives Me receives Him who sent Me”** (Matthew 10:40).

Jesus did not hide the sad truth from His apostles that they would be like sheep among wolves. They would be verbally and physically abused. They would be betrayed by their own families. Some of them would be killed because of their preaching of Jesus. He said to them: **“You will be hated by all for My name’s sake”** (Matthew 10:22).

This did not mean they were to put themselves in danger if they could avoid it. No, they were to **“be wise as serpents and harmless as doves”** (Matthew 10:16). When they were persecuted in one place, Jesus told them to **“flee to another”** (Matthew 10:23). How were they to respond when they were challenged by authorities? Jesus told them: **“Do not worry ... It will be given to you in that hour what you should speak; for it is not you who speak, but the Spirit of your Father who speaks in you”** (Matthew 10:19-20).

Jesus knew that they would face the same the hostility He faced in His ministry. In fact, Jesus knew what was going to happen to Him: He would be crucified. If such things happened to Him, His apostles could expect the same or similar things to happen to them. But not even a sentence of death should frighten them. Jesus said: **“Do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. But rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in**

hell” (Matthew 10:28). The eternal outcome is what counts, not life in this world. **“He who finds his life will lose it, and he who loses his life for My sake will find it”** (Matthew 10:39).

Jesus spoke similar words of instruction, warning, and encouragement when He sent the seventy (some manuscripts say seventy-two) **“two by two before His face into every city and place where He Himself was about to go”** (Luke 10:1). His last words to them certainly still apply to missionaries today who speak His Word faithfully: **“He who hears you hears Me, he who rejects you rejects Me, and he who rejects Me rejects Him who sent Me”** (Luke 10:16).

When we examine the methods and tools of Paul, the missionary to the Gentiles, we find that he also spoke the Word of God formally and informally in various places, such as the Jewish synagogues and meeting places, the marketplace, his own rented quarters, and people’s homes. We find that he traveled by ship, by foot, and on horseback. It seems that he spent most of his time in the larger cities rather than in the small villages. In Ephesus he did his teaching in the school of Tyrannus.

It seems Paul usually worked with partners, such as Barnabas and Silas and Luke. He gave on-the-job training to younger assistants, such as Mark, Timothy, and Titus, to whom he later entrusted a larger portion of the work. Timothy took charge of the work in Ephesus; Titus handled the work in Crete; and according to church historians, Mark took charge of the churches in Alexandria in Egypt.

Paul taught, as Jesus did, that the laborer is worthy of his wages, for he wrote: **“The Lord has commanded that those who preach the gospel should live from the gospel”** (1 Corinthians 9:14). Nevertheless, he determined that he, himself, would not use this right, so that he could not be accused of carrying out his ministry in order to accumulate wealth for himself. He was a tentmaker by trade, and he supported himself and his associates by this means, although he also accepted financial support from some of the congregations he served.

Paul did not just gather followers and then go on to another place to gather more followers. Rather, he appointed or had his congregations appoint elders, leaders, or pastors from among their members to oversee the work in the congregations. In doing this he was following his own teaching that God is not a God of confusion. And Paul did not ignore or neglect the congregations he had founded, but he remained in contact with them through letters, personal visits, or visits from his helpers. He considered the spiritual care of all the churches he founded to be his responsibility, and it was a major part of his work as a missionary. He was primarily a planter, but he was also involved in the continuing care of the congregations he planted.

It is clear from his letters and from the book of Acts that he was thorough in his teaching; he did not refrain from teaching the whole counsel of God. He did not feed his congregations only milk but he also gave them solid food as soon as possible. He did not compromise with false teaching or false teachers. He did not change his message to make it more acceptable to his hearers.

Some of the first Lutheran missionaries were Heinrich Pluetschau and Bartholomaeus Ziegenbalg. They were sent from Denmark to a Portuguese trading post in the far-off land of India. Their native languages were probably German and Danish. To carry out their work they spent much time and energy at first in striving to learn the Portuguese language of the traders and the Tamil language of the Indians. But they went beyond merely learning the Tamil language. They also attempted to become familiar with the Indian culture, literature and Hindu philosophy, so that they could better understand the thought processes of the Indian people.

They organized classes for instructing the people in the fundamentals of Christian doctrine. Their first converts were five Portuguese slaves. From the very beginning they held regular worship services in the German language for their own spiritual growth and the spiritual growth of their wives and children.

When they witnessed the gross idolatry of the heathen, they wrongly imitated the Old Testament kings and prophets by knocking off the heads of idols in heathen temples. That was God's command only for His Old Testament people in the land that God had given them, but this was not God's way nor Paul's way regarding the Roman and Greek gods and goddesses. The apostle Paul wrote: **"We do not war according to the flesh. For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal"** (2 Corinthians 10:3-4). Our only weapon is the Word of God, which is the sword of the Holy Spirit.

To provide employment for the natives they established a printing press and translated Christian materials into the Tamil language and other Indian languages. Even as Martin Luther profited greatly from the printing press to spread the teachings of Christ in German and Latin, so also these Lutheran missionaries used the printed word to scatter the precious Gospel seed. They even established a paper mill to supply paper for their printing projects.

They used their furloughs in Europe to inform the Christians back home of the blessings that God had brought them, and to stir up interest and support for this mission project. They also used their furloughs to plead for financial support, for one cannot expect at first that converts will have the means or the desire to support the work themselves.

They recognized that they could reach the people much more readily through native preachers because they would better understand the ways of the people. Therefore, they began a school (seminary) for the purpose of training Indian boys to become pastors and teachers. They began with eight students.

The people of India at that time (and still today to some extent) were divided into various castes. The two missionaries proclaimed the Gospel of Christ to all castes, but they directed most of their efforts to a middle-class caste, neither the upper elites nor the so-called untouchables.

In their worship they retained the traditional Lutheran liturgy of the old country with some adjustments for native music. They did not admit anyone into actual church membership without careful instruction in the Word of God. They organized a system of church discipline that was carried out by the native members themselves.

Since most of India was under British control at that time, they did what they could to be friendly to the British government. There were times when the authorities hindered their work and frustrated their efforts. It was necessary for them to exercise abundant patience.

It seems that we can learn more from the methods and tools used by Pluetschau and Ziegenbalg than from the methods and tools used by nineteenth and twentieth century missionaries. These later missionaries used the approach of establishing mission stations, large compounds with mission schools and dispensaries. Almost all the leadership was provided by non-local missionaries, who tried to establish the culture of their home countries in a foreign land. It seems that they considered their own culture to be much superior to the native culture, and therefore they emphasized the training of the illiterate and “primitive” heathen in the ways of their “more civilized” countries.

Instead of training natives to become leaders and establish their own churches and instead of training the people to become self-governing, the mission stations remained dependent on their mother churches for financial support and leadership. Sometimes the missions and their leaders became involved with the colonial government, which also treated the native peoples as underlings rather than equal associates.

As a reaction against colonialism and paternalism, some churches and foreign mission agencies developed what was called an “indigenous mission policy”. They sought to develop a local church that was self-supporting, self-governing, and self-propagating. This seems to be good policy, unless that the local church also develops its own doctrine that makes compromises on Bible truth to make it fit in better with native beliefs and native culture. If a mission is no longer faithful to Bible teaching in every way, it has become a heterodox (false-teaching) church, rather than a faithful confessional or orthodox church.

Another danger one faces in mission work is placing too much emphasis on outward growth in numbers, rather than on spiritual growth and thorough catechetical training. An emphasis on numbers results in a Christianity that has little depth and is easily blown away by false teachings and charismatic preachers that are not solidly grounded in God’s Word. This does not follow Paul’s methods, as illustrated by his letters to the Ephesians and the Romans.

A better way to conduct a Christian mission in our time is to concentrate on training national workers who are thoroughly instructed in God’s Word so that they can stand on their own theologically and understand and appreciate and totally agree with the orthodox Lutheran confessions. This means developing and translating and printing Christian literature in the language of the people that is totally faithful to Bible teaching and that is entirely Christ-centered. Since the Holy Spirit works through the means of grace, we need to bind ourselves to teaching the Word of God in its truth and purity and, at the same time, being good

examples of Christian living. Once there are a few national leaders who are on their way to becoming true confessional Lutheran theologians, they can develop an indigenous church without cutting off the ties to confessional Lutheran church bodies in other lands who may be able to aid in certain areas.

At all times we need to remember that our Lord wants us to make disciples of all nations, not only bringing the Gospel to them, but also **“teaching them to observe all things”** (Matthew 28:20) that Jesus has commanded us. One American Lutheran missionary in Africa has written: “Training nationals to become lay leaders, evangelists, pastors, professors and administrators of their church is the most important task” (E. Wendland: *The Missionary*, p. 5). “This should begin as soon as the mission is established.” Some kind of training school needs to be set up, “designed to prepare nationals to preach and teach in local congregations by giving them basic courses in Bible study, church doctrine and practice, ... also specific instructions concerning how to preach, teach, and conduct a church service.”

It is usually necessary to work through interpreters at first. But as soon as possible the training should be given in the language of the national workers and the people. Working through interpreters is not always satisfactory. Using materials written by non-Lutheran authors may at times introduce false teaching or confuse the use of Law and Gospel; it is best to begin by translating doctrinally sound materials and then continue by writing our own materials in the languages of the people.

Hymns and liturgies should be developed that are both faithful to God’s Word and understandable to the people – keeping with their way of singing and speaking. Pray to the Lord of the Church to provide the appropriate gifts of personnel to lead the study of languages to equip Christians with faithful forms of devotion and worship.

Today there have been many technological advances in communication and word studies that can be used in Christian mission work in almost any country of the world. But it is not enough just to supply all kinds of modern equipment if there is no one who knows how to use these tools or to maintain them. Therefore, along with the tools must come training to use these tools. Sometimes it may be better to hire commercial experts to do some work for us, rather than to try to spend a lot of precious time that could be better used in other ways. As we are able, we can of course use whatever God has provided for the transmission of the Gospel and the training in Christian doctrine and practice, including radio and television and other more recent inventions.

Questions

1. How did Jesus go about His work of preaching and teaching the Jewish people?
2. How did Jesus train His disciples to preach and teach?
3. What are some of His instructions that no longer applies to us today?
4. What warnings did He give His disciples that still apply to us today?
5. Why would rejection of their message have such serious consequences?
6. What did both Jesus and Paul teach about paying pastors and teachers?
7. Why did Paul prefer to support himself by making tents?
8. How did Paul provide for the continuation of the work after he moved on?
9. What tools did Martin Luther use to spread the Gospel in his day?
10. How did Ziegenbalg and Pluetschau begin their work in India?
11. What are some things that they did that we should not imitate or follow?
12. Why is language study so important in spreading the Gospel?
13. What mistakes did many 19th and 20th century missionaries make?
14. What is meant by an indigenous mission policy? Is it good or bad?
15. Why is it so important to train pastors who are native to the area?
16. What technological advances can we use in your country?
17. Why is it so important to emphasize Matthew 28:20 in our mission work?