



Provided by the Church of the Lutheran Confession - Board of Missions

Missiology

Lesson 24 – Every Christian and Every Pastor is a Missionary

Paul and Barnabas were sent out by the congregation at Antioch in Syria to bring the Gospel of Christ to cities and towns that did not know Christ. We call such people missionaries – people are sent by one group of Christians to proclaim the Gospel in another place. Other ministers remained in Antioch of Syria to work with the people in Antioch who were already Christians, to feed them with the Word of God and to encourage them to continue in the faith. In a sense these pastors were missionaries also, for they brought the Gospel to as many people as they could in the place where they were stationed. But their chief task was to shepherd those who were already Christians. The Christians in Antioch who were not pastors and teachers were also missionaries in a sense, for they were interested in sharing their faith in Christ with those who did not know Him or believe in Him. In other words, all Christians are involved in the great mission enterprise both by supporting missionaries and their own pastors, as also by talking about Christ in their own circles and in their own neighborhoods. All Christians have the privilege of supporting the great mission of Christ by living lives in line with the Gospel, and thus adorning the Gospel by their good works. Every believers in Christ is a priest for God and every Christian and every pastor is in fact a missionary.

The first letter of the apostle Peter was addressed to all the Christians **“in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia”** (1 Peter 1:1). He writes to all of them: **“You are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light”** (1 Peter 2:9). All of those called out of darkness into the light of faith in Christ proclaim the praises of God who called them. That is why we say in *Concerning Church and Ministry*: *“Scripture teaches that those who receive the Gospel as a personal, inward possession by faith do in and through that very experience become preachers of the Gospel. The Holy Spirit, who always accompanies the Gospel, not only creates faith by means thereof but in that very act also makes witnesses of those whom He enlightens and sanctifies. ... God so fashions His Christians that from within their new hearts they proclaim the Gospel; this is an inherent function of the new life within them”* (*Concerning Church and Ministry*, p. 25).

The Bible refers specifically to the **“eleven disciples”** (Matthew 28:16; also Mark 16:14) to whom Jesus spoke the words of the Great Commission (Matthew 28:18-20; also Mark 16:15-18). Nevertheless, we can hardly restrict the Commission to these eleven apostles, since Jesus concluded with the words: **“And lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age”** (Matthew 28:20).

Nor can we restrict the giving of the keys of heaven to Peter only (Matthew 16:19) nor just to the twelve apostles only (Matthew 18:18), for in Matthew 18 Jesus is speaking simply to **“disciples”** (Matthew 18:1), and His words in that chapter are certainly directed to all Christians. When Jesus breathed on His disciples on Easter Sunday evening, we know that Cleopas and his friend were among those who were present, for it is stated specifically that **“they (Cleopas and his friend) rose up that very hour and returned to Jerusalem, and found the eleven and those who were with them gathered together”** (Luke 24:33). It was to this larger group of His disciples that Jesus said: **“As the Father has sent Me, I also send you. ... Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained”** (John 20:21-23).

When Jesus spoke to His disciples before His ascension to heaven, He told them: **“You shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth”** (Acts 1:8). This work of witnessing continues among all the followers of Christ, even though the apostles themselves are no longer with us. The apostle Paul wrote: **“To each one of us grace was given according to the measure of Christ’s gift”** (Ephesians 4:7). All Christians are involved in the work of missions, but God also supplies His Church with special gifts: **“He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ”** (Ephesians 4:11-12). Notice that leaders are not to do all the work themselves; they are God’s special gifts given to the Church to equip all the Christians (**“the saints”**) to do the work of ministry, each in his or her own way as the Lord provides.

Therefore, this is our confession: *“The ministry of the keys, which is the ministry of the Word, has been committed to the holy Christian Church – therefore to each Christian man, woman, and child. Christians are to be personally active in this ministry in every possible way which is not in violation of God’s will and ordinance”* (Thesis I on the Ministry, Concerning Church and Ministry, p. 25).

When the apostle Paul was still the Pharisee Saul persecuting the Christians, **“they (the believers in Jerusalem) were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles. ... Therefore those who were scattered went everywhere preaching the word”** (Acts 8:1, 4). The apostles themselves stayed in Jerusalem during this crisis, but the scattered Christians were not quiet about their faith, and soon there were congregations of Christians throughout Judea, Samaria, and as far away as Damascus and Antioch of Syria. This was before Paul and Barnabas were sent out as missionaries to the Gentiles.

One student of the early history of the Church, Michael Green, has researched how the Church grew so quickly in the first and second centuries. Here are some of his comments:

“They were scattered from their base in Jerusalem and they went everywhere spreading the good news which had brought joy, release, and a new life to themselves. This must often have been not formal preaching, but the informal chattering to friends and chance acquaintances, in homes and wine shops, on walks,

and around market stalls. They went everywhere gossiping the gospel; they did it naturally, enthusiastically, and with the conviction of those who are not paid to say that sort of thing. ... In the early days the faith was spontaneously spread by informal evangelists. ... It was axiomatic that every Christian was called to be a witness to Christ, not only by life but by lip. Everyone was to be an apologist, at least to the extent of being ready to give a good account of the hope that was within them. And this emphatically included women" (*Evangelism in the Early Church*, Michael Green, pp. 173-175).

"Evangelism was the prerogative and the duty of every Church member. ... The ordinary people of the Church saw it as their job: Christianity was supremely a lay movement, spread by informal missionaries. The clergy of the Church saw it as their responsibility, too. ... This infectious enthusiasm on the part of such diverse people of differing ages, backgrounds, sex, and cultures was backed up by the quality of their lives" (*Evangelism in the Early Church*, Michael Green, p. 274).

"Unless there is a transformation of contemporary church life so that once again the task of evangelism is something which is seen as incumbent on every baptized Christian and is backed up by a quality of living which outshines the best that unbelief can muster, we are unlikely to make much headway through techniques of evangelism. Men will not believe that Christians have good news to share until they find that bishops and bakers, university professors and housewives, bus drivers and street corner preachers are all alike keen to pass it on, however different their methods may be" (*Evangelism in the Early Church*, Michael Green, p. 275).

"Together with this enthusiasm ... went a deep sense of the seriousness of the issues involved. These men really believed that men without Christ might suffer eternal and irreparable loss, and this thought drove them to unremitting labors to reach them with the Gospel" (*Evangelism in the Early Church*, Michael Green, p. 275).

"Evangelism today is often associated with the great public meeting. It is a remarkable fact that the early Church seems to have made very little use of this method of commending the Gospel. ... The emphasis lay on home and personal evangelism" (*Evangelism in the Early Church*, Michael Green, p. 279).

There is no doubt that Martin Luther clearly taught the universal priesthood of all believers in Christ. In subsequent years, however, not all those called Lutheran have emphasized this teaching. Perhaps some of them have even contributed to the notion that the only duty of ordinary Christians is to "pray, pay, and obey", as the saying goes. Therefore, it is our task today to increase the awareness of the calling of all believers concerning their mission of heralding the Gospel to all the world. The apostle Peter was talking to all Christians when he wrote: **"You also, as living stones, are being built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ"** (1 Peter 2:5).

Questions

1. In what way are all Christian pastors also missionaries?
2. In what way are all Christians also missionaries?
3. When do Christians become missionaries?
4. For whom are the words of the Great Commission intended?
5. To whom did Jesus give the ministry of the keys?
6. What do the keys open and close when they are used?
7. Show that some Christian congregations were not founded by apostles.
8. How did Christ's Church grow so quickly in the first and second centuries?
9. What makes evangelism such an urgent undertaking?
10. Why is the slogan "Pray, pay, and obey" a poor slogan for evangelism?
11. What Scripture led Luther to teach the priesthood of all believers?