

The Global Church

As important as the local church is, God's plan extends way beyond your town. As much as God wants you to reach the people in your community, He has no intention of stopping there. God's plan of redemption reaches into your neighborhood—and to every other city, village, and jungle around the globe!

If your church bands together and reaches out to every individual in your community, you are still not done with God's mission. No matter how big of a revival you experience, your area is still only a small part of the world that God has sent us to transform through His gospel. Until our vision of the church encompasses the entire globe, we do not have an accurate view of God's church or His plan of redemption.

All the Families of the Earth

Let's go back to the very beginning. As soon as God's good world became corrupted by the sin of Adam and Eve, God made a promise to restore it. God told the serpent:

I will put enmity between you and the woman,
and between your offspring and her offspring;
he shall bruise your head,
and you shall bruise his heel. (Gen. 3:15)

The devastating influence of sin would affect all of mankind, and the struggle for redemption would be between the offspring of the woman and the offspring of the serpent. Ultimately, this promise became a reality in the person of Jesus Christ, who crushed Satan's head by dying on the cross and rising from the grave. But it is also important to see that this promise belongs to the human race. It is not confined to any ethnic group or geographical location. The promise of redemption is as broad as humanity.

God reiterated this promise to Abraham:

I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed. (Gen. 12:2–3)

The blessing that God promised here worked itself out through Abraham's descendants: the people of Israel. Ultimately, the blessing centered upon one Israelite in particular, Jesus of Nazareth. But we have to remember that although the promise came through one nation, the blessing has always been intended for all nations.

God has called your church to play a role in His plan of redemption. And since His plan is a global plan, your church needs to think beyond your city limits. You can't be everywhere at once, and your resources and manpower are limited. But in order to be a part of God's mission on earth, you need to think in global terms.

Q1 In your own words, why is it important to think about God's plan of redemption in global terms?

Q2 When you think about the mission of your church, does the rest of the globe factor in at all? How so?

Where Christ Has Not Been Named

When you study the New Testament, you will look at Paul's missionary career. Though we may think of Paul as a theologian or a pastor, he was a missionary in every sense of the word. Much of the book of Acts follows Paul as he travelled—often amid great danger, difficulty, and persecution—from place to place, proclaiming the gospel and forming churches among those who responded by following Jesus.

It wasn't an accident that Paul spent so much of his life spreading the gospel to new areas. In Romans 15:20–21, Paul explained that this was his passion:

I make it my ambition to preach the gospel, not where Christ has already been named, lest I build on someone else's foundation, but as it is written,

“Those who have never been told of him will see, and those who have never heard will understand.”

When Paul said “as it is written,” he was quoting Isaiah 52, which describes Jesus as the servant of the Lord who would suffer in order to bring healing to His people. Earlier in the chapter, God clearly explained that although He was speaking directly to Israel, His salvation is for all of the nations, and He would specifically send ministers to spread this good news:

How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him who brings good news, who publishes peace, who brings good news of happiness, who publishes salvation, who says to Zion, “Your God reigns.” ... The LORD has bared his holy arm before the eyes of all the nations, and all the ends of the earth shall see the salvation of our God. (Isa. 52:7, 10)

Interestingly, Paul cited the beginning of this passage earlier in the book of Romans. Paul made clear not only that salvation is offered to all mankind but also that we are called to take an active role in spreading the gospel:

There is no distinction between Jew and Greek; for the same Lord is Lord of all, bestowing his riches on all who call on him. For “everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.”

How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching?

And how are they to preach unless they are sent? As it is written, “How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news!” (Rom. 10:12–15)

So what does this all mean? God’s plan of redemption belongs to all of humanity, yet only those who have heard the message are able to respond to it. Paul’s ambition in life was to take this message of redemption and bring it to those who had never heard.

Keep in mind that Paul’s passion to spread the gospel more broadly was not a personal preference. It was an essential part of the mission that Jesus gave to the church. Remember that Christ commanded us to make disciples among all nations. We misunderstand God’s plan of redemption unless we see it reaching to all humanity.

Q3 Take some time to think about the passages above (Romans 15:20–21, Isaiah 52:7–10, Romans 10:12–15). How should these truths affect the way we think about our calling?

Before the End Will Come

This world will not end until God’s plan is accomplished. God sends His people out into the world to embody and to proclaim His healing, and He will not wrap up human history until this has been accomplished. If His plan has always been about redeeming people from every nation on earth, then He is not content with happy, healthy churches in our communities alone—and we shouldn’t be either. Though we should long to see Christ glorified in our immediate context, we should share Paul’s passion to see Him glorified in every corner of the globe.

Though the details surrounding the end of the earth and the timeframe of many of the prophecies in the Bible are the subject of frequent debate, Jesus made clear that the message of the gospel should not be isolated to one part of the globe: “This gospel of the kingdom will be proclaimed throughout the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come” (Matt. 24:14).

Many Christians are surprised to hear that there are still many groups of people around the world that have never heard the name of Jesus. We take it for granted that the people around us have access to the gospel if they ever develop an interest. Even if there’s not a church or a Christian in close proximity (though this is difficult to imagine), at the very least everyone has access to gospel messages on the television, radio, or Internet. But that is simply not the case worldwide. There are people around the world who desperately need hope, healing, and salvation, but who don’t have access to the message of redemption.

Paul’s questions are as relevant today as they were two thousand years ago: How will they call on Him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in Him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching? And how are they to preach unless they are sent?

These questions should burn in our minds and in our hearts. We are not following Jesus fully if we are not concerned about proclaiming the “gospel of the kingdom ... throughout the whole world” (Matt. 24:14). This is what Jesus did while He was on earth. And now, through the power of His death and resurrection, Jesus calls us to do the same.

Q4 Have you given much thought to the unreached people groups around the world? If so, how does this affect your thinking and lifestyle? If not, why do you think you have never thought about it?

Working Together for the Gospel

Once we start developing a passion for Christ's glory to be seen around the world, we need to figure out what role we are called to play. Make no mistake, every Christian is called to be involved in spreading the gospel around the world! No one is off the hook. No one is called to a life that is separate from global missions. But this doesn't mean that we all need to immediately start packing for the jungle.

God may well want you to take His gospel overseas. Too many Christians discount that possibility too quickly. Some people are too comfortable with their current lifestyle and would never dream of sacrificing their comfort for God's glory. Others quickly assume that they are called to something else, something more normal. We shouldn't make these assumptions. Have you ever genuinely told God that you would submit yourself to His will in this area? Right now, you should ask God if He wants you to pursue living in a different location for the sake of the gospel. It may be a terrifying thought, but we have to trust God more than we trust ourselves. We are here on this earth for His glory. God has blessed you so that you will use whatever He has given you for His glory, not yours. Ultimately, we should expect God's plan to lead us places that we wouldn't naturally go.

Q5 Take a minute to pause and ask God what He wants for your life. Ask Him to break through any excuses you may be hiding behind and idols you might be clinging to. Ask Him to make you willing to follow Him in whichever direction He might lead. If you have any thoughts based on this time of prayer, make a few notes below.

We all need to consider whether God is calling us to follow Him onto the mission field, but we have to remember that this is not the only way of working to fulfill God's plan to reach every nation. If we decide that God wants us to remain in the area in which He has placed us for the time being, then we need to be using our resources to further the mission around the world. Even if we find our primary ministry in the people directly surrounding us, we need to be praying for our fellow workers in other parts of the earth. The church is spread across the world, and we need to be doing everything in our power to reach people in every corner of the globe.

John wrote a letter to a Christian man named Gaius who had been helping missionaries as they travelled to spread the gospel more broadly. His words put our role in supporting missionaries around the world in perspective:

It is a faithful thing you do in all your efforts for these brothers, strangers as they are, who testified to your love before the church. You will do well to send them on their journey in a manner worthy of God. For they have gone out for the sake of the name, accepting nothing from the Gentiles. Therefore we ought to support people like these, that we may be fellow workers for the truth. (3 John v. 5–8)

John said that "we ought to support people like these" (i.e., missionaries), and that in supporting them we are actually "fellow workers for the truth." None of us is beyond the task of missions.

We are all in this together. We all have a part to play. We may never set foot in a remote jungle, but our lives should be devoted to seeing God's will be done in our neighborhoods and in Africa and Papua New Guinea. When we take up the call to follow Jesus, we are committing to making disciples in our hometowns and in the Middle East. The question is not whether or not we will be working to spread the gospel around the world, but what role we will play in this. A church that is not devoted to the cause of Christ around the world is not a church in the biblical sense.

Q6 How would you describe your role in furthering the gospel around the world? If nothing comes to mind, write down a few things that you can begin to pursue in order to make missions a part of your life.

A Vision of the End

God tells us that history is moving toward a specific and glorious end. God promised Abraham that through him all the nations of the earth would be blessed. This is what God's plan of redemption has been about from the very beginning. And when we look ahead to the end of the story, we see that God's promise to Abraham will be fulfilled. There is no doubt about whether or not the church will fulfill its mission; we know for certain that this is how the world will end.

John was actually allowed to see the fulfillment of this promise that God made to Abraham:

After this I looked, and behold, a great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, with palm branches in their hands, and crying out with a loud voice, "Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!" (Rev. 7:9–10)

This is where we are headed. As distant and unfamiliar as the churches in India, Africa, China, and Papua New Guinea may seem, our future is inextricably tied to theirs. When Jesus returns to reclaim this world as its rightful King, we will find ourselves praising God alongside Christians from every age and from every nation on earth.

God's plan for our future ought to affect the way we live and think today. Does the church in China matter to you? When you hear about the persecution that Christians are enduring in other parts of the world, do you feel any compassion for them? When you hear about a mission setting off for Iraq or Thailand, do you make plans to pray for them or support them financially? These are our brothers and sisters. Their mission is the same as ours. They are working together with us toward the same goal. We cannot fulfill the mission that God has given us without them.

Jesus called His followers to be His witnesses "in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth" (Acts 1:8). We have not yet reached the end of the earth, but through the power of God's Spirit, we will. As followers of Jesus Christ, our calling is to faithfully make disciples. These disciples are also called to make disciples. Jesus promises that He will be with us as we do this, right down to the very end (Matt. 28:20). We don't know when that end will come, but we want to be faithful in making disciples until that time comes. We are God's creations, living in God's earth, placed within God's plan of redemption. May our lives be devoted to His kingdom and His glory.

Q7 In order to faithfully follow Jesus and play your part in God's plan of redemption, what should your life look like right now? (This is a huge question, but try to write down a few things to guide you as you seek to put the things you've learned into practice.)

Q8 Spend some time in prayer. Ask God to help you submit to Him entirely. Ask Him to guide you and empower you in anything He calls you to do. Pray that God would use you in your neighborhood and around the world in any capacity that He sees fit.