

AXCESS – 1/15/08

The Mission of Christ in Church

Welcome...

Last Semester @ Axcress... What we intended to do last semester is provide you with a holistic picture of who Jesus Christ is (who He claimed to be & proved to be)... And we also wanted to give a holistic picture of what it is He has accomplished (both past, present, and future) throughout the course of history.

And so we studied *The Mission of Christ in the World...*

Now this semester we want to turn the corner a bit- and start really fleshing out the life and ministry of Christ in our own calling as Christ's followers...

And so this spring is gonna be all about the people of God, i.e.- His church. = our identity & our mission (which in reality, is Christ's mission through us).

Now interestingly enough, this issue we're going to be talking about this semester has probably never been more popular as it is today.

STAT: More books have been written & sold on the issue of the church in the past 5 years than there has in the past 500.

So it appears as if there's a lot of interest, if not a lot of questions concerning the identity, purpose, and practices of the church than ever before.

But with this heightened interest, also comes with it a sea of confusion as well. Not only do we have a thousand different denominations within a given city- but within those denominations are a thousand different opinions on the church as well.

And so we felt it was highly important here in College Life- for at least a semester - to take a in-depth look at what God intends for His people (the church) to be about...

We're not talking about church structure, or leadership, or buildings, or services, or style – or any of those other secondary issues... We're talking about the essential characteristics that we, as follower's of Christ, are called to embody. And the mission that we've been called to pursue.

And so hopefully by the end of this semester, at the very least, we in this room (as the body of Christ) will have a clearer picture of who God has called us to be and what it is we've been called to do.

Survey of God's Mission Throughout History:

Now last semester, we tried to show you that God's primary business throughout the course of history involved revealing Himself to the nations He has created – and reconciling or redeeming those nations back unto Himself...

This is the way it has been since the beginning of creations... The revelation of God and the redemption of God's people --- All of which, is to the glory of God and the magnification of His name...

For instance, think of all the ways in which God has revealed Himself (both today, and throughout history)...

CREATION (NATURE)

- *...that which is known about God is evident within them; for God made it evident to them. For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse. – Romans 1:19-20*
- *The heavens are telling of the glory of God; And their expanse is declaring the work of His hands. Day to day pours forth speech, And night to night reveals knowledge. There is no speech, nor are there words; Their voice is not heard. – Psalm 19:1-3*

LAW – reveals the character of God

CONSCIENCE

- *For when Gentiles who do not have the Law do instinctively the things of the Law, these, not having the Law, are a law to themselves, in that they show the work of the Law written in their hearts, their conscience bearing witness and their thoughts alternately accusing or else defending them, – Romans 2:14-15*

PROVIDENTIAL BLESSINGS

- *"In the generations gone by He permitted all the nations to go their own ways; and yet He did not leave Himself without witness, in that He did good and gave you rains from heaven and fruitful seasons, satisfying your hearts with food and gladness." – Acts 14:17*

MIRACLES, DREAMS, ANGELS, PROPHETS, GOD'S WORD (BIBLE), Etc...

Why? A = because He's a loving God who is who deeply desires a relationship with His creation. He's not only a God who wants to be known- but can be known and has made Himself known to His creation...

Now it hasn't always been this way... and what I mean by that- is that there was a time when having a relationship with God (the creator) was a given... Adam walked with God. Adam communed with God... so the idea of "knowing God" wasn't even an issue.

But sin entered the scene. Adam rebelled against God- and as a result- all mankind was separated from Him- unable to know Him the way we were originally designed to know Him...

And due to our own sin, man- ever since- has been on a journey to discover God on his own... only instead of seeking to know the one true God- we've put other things in His place... It happened there in the garden, it's happened throughout history- and it continues today...

Whether it's...

- Knowledge, Fortune, Our own glory, mate, vanity, self-esteem, philosophy, etc...

So once you understand that- then you understand why it's so important that God intentionally reveal Himself... because unless He initiates that revelation- we'll be too stupid to find Him ourselves.

So all throughout history, God has been in the business of revealing Himself- through various means at various times... Making Himself, His character, and His purposes known to man... because He is deeply in love with His creation and desires that we not be living in darkness as to...

- who we are
- who created us
- & why we've been created

And so by knowing Him- we are illumined to those things... and by revealing Himself- the glory goes to Him, rather than to lesser things...

So stop right there... just that fact alone... that God is a God who has chosen to reveal Himself to a sinful group of people like you and me- so we can actually know Him... that right there is enough for us to fall on our face in gratitude- that He has not left us to try and figure Him out on our own.

But there's more... there's a second major business of God throughout history in addition to the revealing Himself... and that is the Redeeming of His people... the reconciliation of the nations...

As good as it is to have a God that has made Himself known to His creation is... it's not enough to simply know about God- and to understand His character, His attributes and His purposes...

But instead, it's His intention for us, as a room full of sinners who have rejected Him- to be reconciled to Him- to be redeemed from our sins- so that we can fully obey Him.

All throughout history, God has been in the business of calling out a people for Himself...

- Out of dirt, He called out the first man (Adam) unto Himself
- Out of the nations- He called out a nation of His own (Israel) who was to reflect the very character and attributes of God
- Gentiles (for salvation)
- Pagan Kings
- Entire Cities & Cultures
- Church (ecclesia = "called out ones")

Everywhere throughout history- where you see man sinking further into the quicksand of his own sin- there you find a God of grace, love, and mercy – who is pulling out His own so that they might be saved- to be reconciled back to God. He's been doing it since the day Adam first sinned- and He's doing it right now- even as I speak.

So there you have it, the dual mission of God throughout human history- that of revealing and redeeming... In the midst of our confession which is that the chief end of man is to glorify God- that is accomplished by God's revealing of Himself to sinful man and His redemption of lost man back to Himself!

Now that dual mission of God culminated into its greatest fulfillment, when Jesus Christ came to earth.

And this is what we talked about last semester... this was the content of all our Life Groups- and that is the mission of Christ in the world.

Because ultimately- it is in Christ that God is revealed & it is in Christ alone, that you and I are redeemed- once for all.

1.) God ultimately REVEALED in Christ

- **Hebrews 1:1-3...** *God, after He spoke long ago to the fathers in the prophets in many portions and in many ways, in these last days has spoken to us in His Son, whom He appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the world. And He is the radiance of His glory and the exact representation of His nature, and upholds all things by the word of His power. When He had made purification of sins, He sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high,*
- **John 1:18...** *No one has seen God at any time; the only begotten God who is in the bosom of the Father, He has explained Him.*
- **Colossians 1:15...** *He (Jesus) is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation.*

So you don't have to search and wonder anymore... God has finally been revealed in Christ!

2.) God's people finally REDEEMED in Christ

- **1 Peter 1:18-19...** *knowing that you were not redeemed with perishable things like silver or gold from your futile way of life inherited from your forefathers, but with precious blood, as of a lamb unblemished and spotless, the blood of Christ.*

- **Colossians 1:13-14...** *For He rescued us from the domain of darkness, and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.*

[Illustration of Redemption Counter @ Chuck E. Cheeses]

That was the mission of Christ... to reveal God to man through His incarnation... and to redeem man to God through His crucifixion & resurrection.

And so we broke down His life in detail... from the prophecies about Him in the OT to His birth in a lowly manger to His life & ministry on earth to His death, burial, & resurrection – and ultimately in His eminent return one day...

The mission of Christ- which was to bring about the knowledge of God through His revelation *of* Him- and to bring about reconciliation to God through our redemption *by* Him...

Now all of that, that I just went through... is a really long survey of all that God has been doing up until the time that Jesus ascended up to Heaven and left us here awaiting His return...

So the question we have for this spring semester... now that Jesus has ascended and is seated at the right hand of the Father... how is God still continuing His primary business of revealing Himself to the nations of the world – and redeeming them back to Himself? How is that happening...

Answer? The Church. His chosen vessel now... is us... the people of God... the body of Christ... Christians... aka “the Church”

We, the followers of Christ, called “His Church” – are the ones chosen by God to continue out that mission...

Put simply... “God intends to reveal Himself through His church in order to redeem the world for His glory.”

And so in light of what we talked about last fall- which was the mission of Christ in the world... this spring we want to talk about the mission of Christ in His church...

Those same to things (revealing & redeeming) are intended to happen through us...

1.) God is Revealing Himself most prominently through us now...

By that, I mean...

- One of our roles is to help the nations understand who God is. God is choosing to reveal His character through His people...

Examples...

- (Israel)... **Isaiah 43:10-12...** *"You are My witnesses," declares the LORD, "And My servant whom I have chosen, So that you may know and believe Me And understand that I am He Before Me there was no God formed, And there will be none after Me. "I, even I, am the LORD, And there is no savior besides Me. "It is I who have declared and saved and proclaimed, And there was no strange god among you; So you are My witnesses," declares the LORD, "And I am God."*
- **Acts 1:8...** *but you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth."*
- **John 13:34-35...** *"A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another. "By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another."*

How we doing? If the vast majority of us in this room would call ourselves Christians... followers of Christ... His church... When we step out of this room tonight- and collectively head back out into our campuses and our city...

- Can people see God in us?

- Are our words and the way we live our lives... are they accurately communicating to a darkened world the correct message about our God?
- Do people clearly understand the person, nature, and mission of our God just by being around us?

God's intent for the church was to REVEAL Himself (through us) to the nations.

2.) God is Redeeming His people most prominently through us now = (obviously via the Holy Spirit's power)

This is who we're to be as a church...

- **Matthew 28:18-19...** *And Jesus came up and spoke to them, saying, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit,*
- **Ephesians 2-3...** main thrust is that the church is the center of God's plan to display His wisdom of God- so that by it, men will be saved.

Now again, how are we doing on this? Again, let's just take this body here in this room...

- Are we seeing people come to Christ through the Spirit's using us?
- Are we as the body of Christ in this room... are we making disciples of Christ here on our campuses? In our city? Across the globe?

My concerns are, that most of us don't truly understand who it is we've been called to be- and what it is we've been called to do as a church...

When you look around at the church here in America, this is typically what you're seeing...

- Church = building, not people
- Insular
- Taker instead of givers
 - Church is often viewed in individual fulfillment- rather than in corporate...
 - It exists for my own self-therapy, rather than an invitation towards a cause bigger than myself
- Bunker mentality instead of wartime
 - Get our hell insurance and ride this thing out
- Church ministry is a stepping stool for my own purposes, rather than joining God in His mission

Sadly, the church in America has probably done more to conceal God than to reveal Him... and more people than ever are finding themselves confused about who we're to be as a church...

This is not God's intention for calling us together as a church... we have a higher mission than that.

And so as I mentioned earlier... for the next 7 weeks, we want to explore the mission of Christ through His church...

In light of last semester, we have pulled 7 vital characteristics from life and mission of Jesus- that we, as His church, should embody...

- 1.) A Community of Truth
- 2.) A Community of Grace
- 3.) A Community of Worship
- 4.) A Community of Love
- 5.) A Community of Holiness
- 6.) A Community of Suffering
- 7.) A Community of Faith & Hope

God intends to reveal Himself through a community of (ALL 7) in order to redeem the world for His glory.

Now if I'm God, you give me a group of followers who reflect my Perfect Son, by embodying those characteristics as a church... combined with the power of my Holy Spirit- and we got something that can turn the world upside down! Where the character of God can be clearly seen, and souls can be redeemed from their sin... - And God is glorified with the glory that is due Him!

Now that's what we're going to dive into this spring...

Goal of this series... want to change the paradigm of church in America so we can obediently become the church God saved us to be...

And so that at the end of this year... you will clearly know what Christ's mission is on this earth and throughout human history... and then clearly know His mission through us, as His image-bearing church...

Pray