

Article of the Month – January 2013

Missionary Aspects in the Gospel – Matthew (1)

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Jesus Christ is the Messiah, truly God and truly Man, *the central Person* in the Gospel; even more so there, than anywhere else in the Scriptures, because of His life and presence among us on earth.

In the Old Testament we saw world missions foreshadowed; in the New we see reality with the appearance of the great Missionary Himself. He is the pivot around Whom all history revolves, the Centre of the Universe Who will be seen by all and can be escaped by none.¹

It is said: ‘God has only one Son, and He made Him a missionary’. Jesus was the greatest Sent One of all times, sent by the Father² to save people from sin.³ Being sent with a specific purpose is the greatest common denominator in all Gospels, which are actually missionary biographies. In becoming a missionary Jesus had come a long way.⁴

In Genesis we saw *sent ones* eventually become *senders*. This principle is magnified in the Gospels. After Jesus accomplished His mission He sent His disciples into the world to finish what He had started.⁵ When we compare the missiological data in the Gospels, we see that all are needed to gain a good missions perspective.

The aspect of suffering comes through loudly in all Gospels, first through Jesus’ example, then through His warnings about persecution the disciples would suffer. Some of these I have mentioned in the earlier articles about theology of suffering.⁶

The significance of suffering in the Christian’s life is important enough to give ample attention to it, not in the last place because it played a major role in Christ’s life. In the Old Testament suffering was understood to be the consequence of sin, and therefore the concept of the *suffering of the righteous* was often not understood (e.g. Job, Joseph, David and others).

In the New Testament, suffering gains new meaning in the light of the Kingdom. *Firstly*, Jesus introduces ‘discipleship-suffering’ as formulated in the third Gospel.⁷ The disciple is ‘to deny himself, take up his cross daily and follow Me’, Christ said. He Himself had to learn obedience through *what He suffered*.⁸ This also applies to His disciples.⁹

¹ Phil. 2:10,11

² John 20:21

³ Matt. 1:21

⁴ Phil. 2:5-11

⁵ Matt. 24:14; 28:18-20; Mark 16:15-18; Luke 24:46-48; John 20:21; Acts 1:8

⁶ See my articles of Aug. & Sept. 2008, of April & May 2010 and of June 2011

⁷ Luke 9:23; 14:33

⁸ Heb. 5:8 (italics mine)

⁹ John 15:18,20

The *second* level we see in the lives of Jesus and Paul, can be called ‘apostleship-suffering’,¹⁰ summarized by Paul as ‘I fill up in my flesh what still lacks in regard to Christ’s afflictions’.¹¹

A sent one submits voluntarily to suffering in order to preach the Gospel where it has not yet been heard.¹² Jesus trains His disciples on both levels, and His life shows that with much suffering comes much fruit. Little suffering will yield little fruit. When suffering is avoided there won’t be fruit. When we see little fruit, it may be so because many disciples try to escape suffering by staying inside their comfort zone.

John the Baptist preached that the *Kingdom of Heaven* had come near.¹³ His radical message was typified by a call to repentance and followed by water baptism. Jesus extended his message¹⁴ and magnified it by His teaching and preaching, which was superior by far; by His healing, casting out of demons, raising the dead and other miracles; and by His authority, superior to that of the Pharisees.

He also revealed the spiritual realities behind the visible elements of His ministry, and exposed the devil as the originator of sin, suffering and spiritual oppression. John wrote later that Jesus was revealed to destroy the works of the devil.¹⁵ The message of the Kingdom means: God rules in the lives of His people, until He establishes His Kingdom on earth, visible for everyone.

Knowing that His ministry on earth would have time-limits and geographical boundaries, Jesus called followers, trained them into leaders and sent them as missionaries. This is still the Church’s blueprint for extending the Kingdom of God in the world.

Jesus calls His followers *disciples*, meaning: pupils, students, people under instruction.¹⁶ Character training was and still is Christ’s most essential module for them. Godly character precedes ministry (*be someone before you do something*). We see this in the Sermon on the Mount.¹⁷ Its message can be summarized as: ‘*Don’t wear masks. Don’t say one thing and behave differently. Practice what you preach, be perfect sons of God and show it. Act in the opposite spirit*’.

Furthermore, the disciples were trained in a life of sacrifice and faith.¹⁸ Only after they had received training were they allowed into the next stage. Along with character-transformation they went through the outreach-example phase. Jesus showed them how He worked¹⁹ before He sent them on their first short-term outreach.²⁰

¹⁰ See e.g. 2 Cor. 6 & 11

¹¹ Col. 1:24

¹² As did Paul, seen his ambition, Rom. 15:20

¹³ Matt. 3:2

¹⁴ 4:17

¹⁵ 1 John 3:8b

¹⁶ Matt. 4:18-22

¹⁷ Chapters 5-7

¹⁸ 8:18-27; Ps. 107:23-30

¹⁹ Chapters 8 & 9

²⁰ Chapter 10

Jesus participated with His disciples in synagogue life, disciplined them and sent them to preach the Kingdom. His approach was one of the *total integration* of church, bible school and sending agency, as Johnstone argued before.²¹

²¹ Patrick Johnstone, *The Church is Bigger than you Think*, 1998:149-210