
ALWAYS ON MISSION

In The World but Not of The World

We know the good news – we are forgiven and know Jesus now, we know He's coming back as promised, and will make heaven on earth, so it kind of feels like we are home but not home. All of that is yet to unfold. So, there must be something more, something good about what our salvation means today.

We belong to Jesus. We are new creations no longer stuck under the oppression of evil and all the stuff in the world that is broken or having to be constrained to the ways of the world. Instead, we belong to Jesus and so become sons and daughters of our Father in heaven. And Jesus prays. Don't take them out of the world but protect them (John 17:15-18). Why would we need protecting? Jesus answers that in the next verse "As you sent me into the world, I have sent them into the world."

Sent

Right from the very beginning as we were made in God's image, we are supposed to then reflect God's image and character in our everyday lives.

Just as we were originally sent into the garden to cultivate the gift of creation we are once again sent into the world on mission, sent into the world as God's gift in order to point everyone back to our original design and original relationship with God.

That feeling of being sent – of being on mission is exactly what Jesus Himself did when He was sent from heaven to earth and gave Himself to the mission of the Father to bless the whole world that He so dearly loves.

So Jesus gets what it's like and what He is now praying is that as we are also sent, we might be protected as we go.

What are We Saved For?

Salvation is not only about personal forgiveness of sins so that when we die, we go to heaven. It also means our original design and purpose is re-awakened. We have been re-commissioned.

All our love, and service, and work we do, all our daily activities and the things we share are supposed to become ways and places to point people towards the bigger picture of God's story.

The problem is that as Christians we can struggle with what it means to live "in the world but not of it". How are we then to engage the culture around us and represent our originally intended design when everything feels like it's going in a different direction?

Engaging the World

Three common misrepresentations that have emerged as Christians have wrestled with this complex question of how to be 'in' but not 'of' the world.

- + **Bunker Down:** This approach takes an "us versus them" perspective to culture. We just need to bunker down and hold out the best we can while the storm passes overhead.
- + **Dominate:** This approach attempts to take control of culture so we can force our values, ideas and faith on those who don't yet know Jesus.
- + **Accommodate:** This approach seeks to blend into the crowd to just get along with everyone.

Strangers in a Strange Land – Jeremiah 29

Jeremiah is a letter written to exiles carried off to Babylon after Israel's military defeat. It was even more devastating for Israel because it meant they no longer were living in the Promised Land. As exiles they felt like "strangers in a strange land", and many would have wondered, "Where is

God in all this mess?" So, Jeremiah sends instructions for living within this foreign land and it totally gives them a new perspective for living in the culture they find themselves.

- + **God places His people into exile with a purpose.** (Verse 4) *"I carried you into exile".* When God's people didn't follow His instructions to go to the nations, He used this situation to send them. Where has God sent you?
- + **Make life thrive where you've been sent.** (Verse 5,7) *"Settle down, plant gardens, seek the welfare of the city."* We aren't told to take over or blend into the culture but bring gifts that bless and point people towards the bigger picture.
- + **Trust in God's plan to finally gather us "home".** That odd feeling that something is not quite right, no matter how good life gets, reminds us we are not home. You can only feel "lost" if there is a place to which you belong, our exile is not forever.

Preparing the Way

Everything we do should point people towards the new reality of God's reign. We are preparing the way for His return. Our lives offer an example of what God's love looks. Just like Israel, we are invited to be a light to the nations pointing people towards the bigger story of God.

Can we stand amid a world that seems to be in chaos around us and do our part of sowing, cultivating and working towards the bigger picture of salvation? Because this is doing our part as we prepare "the way of the Lord".

It all comes down to being ready to share the hope we have in Christ and being ready to love with Christ's love by the power of the Holy Spirit - everywhere, every day, every moment, in everything we do (Colossians 3:23-24).

Mission is not an event, an activity or a hat we take on or off. Mission is in our identity when we belong to God. We have a missionary God, and we

are a sent people. Easy to lose sight of this in the fullness of the Christian message. But this is who we are. Through being (our presence), doing (what we do), telling (how we share) we participate in God's mission.

Discussion Questions

1. Talk about the ways you have been sent to reflect God's image?
2. How are we to engage the culture around us? Share of a time where you have misrepresented God and been 'of' the world.
3. Are we willing to do the hard work in preparing the way for something we might not yet even see?
4. How can we encourage one another to be a faithful representation of God's Kingdom on His mission?
5. Pray for one another as sent ones on God's mission.