



THE COMMUNITY

Mission Impossible 5 | THE CHURCH

What Do I Need to Know About the Passage?

Revelation

The study begins in Matthew 24. Here, Jesus is asked to explain some of the signposts that will accompany His return. Among other signposts, He says that, “first the gospel must be preached to the nations and then the end will come.” By this answer Jesus is clearly tying His return to the resolution of the plot – the fulfillment of the Great Commission.

How Far Have We Come?

It would be nice if all the unreached of the world had some distinguishing feature, like say a bull’s-eye painted on their backs, but as this is not the case, exact numbers are difficult to tabulate. Perhaps, about two-thirds of the world’s 7 billion people have been exposed to the gospel. Making the numbers even trickier, is that the work of missions doesn’t just look at countries, but people groups. Within a country, there might be hundreds of smaller people groups who have their own distinct cultures and dialects. These, too, should have an intelligible witness of Jesus Christ. There may be as many as 24,000 of these people groups, and there are currently 6912 languages spoken (2,000 of which are spoken by fewer than a thousand people). Of course, with globalization these numbers are always shrinking. Most linguists, for example, believe 3,500 languages will disappear entirely by the end of the century.

What’s the Hold Up?

As we left the Book of Acts, the disciples – within the span of about thirty years – had taken the gospel to most of the Roman Empire. So why in the last 2,000 years haven’t we completed the task? Well, it would seem for identical reasons that Israel failed to do so: hard hearts, ethnocentrism, disobedience, corruption, etc. etc. It’s as if the church followed Israel’s example instead of Christ’s.

Here’s a brief summary of the last 2,000 years of missionary activity. The first 400 years, the gospel reached the Roman Empire. The second 400 years, it spread to the Barbarians in northern Europe. From 800-1200, the gospel expanded further north through the Viking invasions, into what today is Sweden, Denmark and Norway. Between 1200-1600, the focus of missions was the Muslims in the Middle East and North Africa. Unfortunately, this effort was combined with the Crusades which we know from history was a really, really, really bad mission strategy.

It wasn’t until the 1600’s that efforts, primarily through the Roman Catholic Church, were made to reach Asia, and South and North America.

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What’s the Big Idea?

This final study in the series examines where we are in fulfilling the Great Commission and ends with a picture from Revelation, where we see the mission completed and people from “every tongue, tribe, and nation” gathered in heaven worshipping Christ.

What’s the Problem?

We are far more ambitious for our own plans, fame and glory than for God’s.

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And it has only been in the last 300 years that Protestants have been intentional about fulfilling the Great Commission. Yet, in a relatively short period of time, Protestant missions have made some incredible strides in bringing the gospel to the world.

Today, the most unreached people primarily reside in the Muslim countries where Christianity and Christian missionaries are illegal. As God is about His work of reaching the nations, Satan continues to be about his work of border patrol.

Missions Strategies

So how, practically speaking, do you reach a nation with the gospel? That's a long answer, but broadly speaking, there are four major strategies. The first is mass media. Through radio broadcasts, the internet and film, billions are exposed to the basic message of the gospel. For example, the JESUS film, which is the gospel of Luke put to film, has been viewed by nearly 6 billion people in just the last 30 years.

The second strategy is church planting, which seeks to establish a Christ-centered church within the various people groups of the country.

Third, is the college campus strategy. This is the most strategic demographic of any country. On the campus resides the next generation of leaders. Reach the campus today, and you'll reach the country tomorrow – or in, say, the next 20-30 years, non-metaphorically speaking. Also, college students all over the world generally speak English and are therefore more easily reached.

And last is the city strategy, focusing on major population centers. As the world's population turns increasingly urban, cities are becoming a high priority of missionary labor. There are, of course, a million and eight other ways that God is at work, taking His offer of salvation to the world, but these are the primary, intentional strategies.

Revelation 7:9-12

In Revelation 7 we see the church of the future. In a highly symbolic vision, the Apostle John witnesses people from every tongue, tribe and nation gathered around the throne in heaven worshiping God. If I showed you pictures of your future grandchildren, you could assume at some point you got married. Likewise, this vision in Revelation 7 assures us that at some point the task will be completed.

In 2 Peter 3:12, Peter makes a very interesting comment concerning the return of Jesus, "...as you look forward to the day of God and speed its coming. That day will bring about the destruction of the heavens by fire, and the elements will melt in the heat."

He seems to be saying that our obedience to Christ, particularly in fulfilling the mission of the church, will actually "speed its coming." So whatever else we may know about our missionary mandate, we know this: that Jesus' return is tied to the fulfillment of the Great Commission (Matthew 24); that the mission will ultimately be completed (Revelation 7); and that our efforts can actually "speed" this along (2 Peter 3:12).

All that remains is for us to discern what role the Lord wants us to play in bringing this about.

What's Our Response?

As this is the last study in the series, you want your group to honestly process what role God has for them in fulfilling the Great Commission. Even if they can't think of anything specific, you want them to be open to however God may use them. And you want them to see themselves as Christ's ambassadors wherever God places them.

In this last study, you also want the group to see the amazing ending of the story of redemption – people from every nation worshipping Christ upon His throne:

...there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb.
(Revelation. 7:9)

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What Are the Questions?

Revelation

Launch

Read Matthew 24:1-14. Why do you think Jesus gave us these signposts of His coming? Do you feel as though His coming could be soon?

Explore

1. Why do you think Jesus ties His return to the gospel being preached to all nations?
2. The church in Acts began so dynamically with evangelism and missions. What stopped the progress? Do you think that it has taken 2,000 years (so far) to complete the mission is according to God’s plan or because of our disobedience?
3. In your own words, what would you say is ‘the gospel of Jesus Christ’?
4. What do you see as some of Satan’s major strategies in recent decades to prevent the fulfillment of the Great Commission?
5. If God gave you the responsibility to reach an entire city with the gospel, how might you go about doing it?
6. Mass media has been used to expose billions to the gospel message. How effective do you think such media outreaches are? What have you seen that’s been effective?
7. Why do you think so much missionary effort is focused on the college campus?

Read Luke 10:1-16.

8. In this passage, Jesus gives final instructions to His disciples as He sends them out on their mission.

What are some principles of missions and evangelism we might pull from this passage?

9. Why do you think Jesus told them to take nothing with them? Why were they to search for a person of peace?
10. Do you think this commissioning of His disciples applies to all of us, or is there a special calling for missionaries?
11. In praying for God to raise up laborers, who would you specifically pray for? How do we play a role in raising up laborers?
12. In the work of ministry, what’s God’s role and what’s ours?
13. In your mind, what makes a missionary effective or ineffective?
14. Read Revelation 7:9-12. Why do you think God has seen fit to show us this scene in Scripture?
15. Read 2 Peter 3:12. Do you think it’s possible to actually “speed” the coming of Christ? If so, how?

Apply

16. If a missionary is “one who is sent by God:” how do you see yourself as a missionary where you are right now?
17. If you could do anything, and money and family were not an obstacle, how would you like to play a role in bringing about Revelation 7:9-12?

18. In the past five weeks of this study, what has been the most surprising thing you’ve learned? What has been the most motivational?

NOTES:

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What Are the Answers?

1. If the plot of Scripture is redemption, this would be the resolution of the plot and would make sense for it to usher in Jesus' return.
2. Discuss. It certainly could be both.
3. This question will help you to see the group's understanding that we are saved by grace through faith in Christ alone.
4. Discuss. Some possible answers: Islam, atheism, relativism.
5. Discuss, but for your own knowledge read "Mission Strategies" in the notes.
6. You might get the group's thoughts on strategies like the JESUS film, every-student.com, or Christian radio.
7. College students are the next generation of leaders in any country. College students all over the world speak English and are therefore more easily reached. The next generation of missionaries also reside on campus.
8. To rely on God; to provide and protect; to see ourselves as Christ's ambassadors; to allow Him to lead and direct our path; and to leave the results in His hands.
9. See answer to question 8.
10. Discuss. We are all called to be Christ's ambassadors and in that sense, missionaries. Yet full-time ministry is a separate question to which one must feel God leading.
11. You want the group to see how important kingdom laborers are to Jesus. Part of discipleship is being completely available to be used by God.
12. It's a partnership. We must go, but God leads, prepares hearts and does the converting.
13. Allow the group to discuss.
14. See notes. This vision affirms that the mission will be completed.
15. Discuss. It does seem that our obedience is tied to the completion of the mission, which in turn is tied to Christ's return (Matt. 24).
16. Allow the group to discuss.
17. This question is to get at the heart of what God may be calling people to do and the way in which He wants them to serve.
18. Allow the group to discuss.

Memorize

The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. Ask the lord of the harvest to send out workers into His harvest field.

luke 10:2



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