

Family Bible Series for Dec. 11: No better time to be a missionary than Christmas

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No better time to be a missionary than Christmas

- Romans 1:1-7, 13-17

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We all like the Christmas season. With the special music, decorations and general feelings of good will, it easily is one of the most beloved times of year.

Yet how often do we think about our responsibility to the baby in the manger? How often do thoughts of being actively involved in spreading the news about Jesus through missions enter our thinking during this season?

Many churches have a special emphasis on missions and take up offerings for missionaries during the Christmas season. While this certainly is a wonderful tradition, it far too often is the only connection with missions many people have. Missions often is seen as something reserved for the

specially called “professional missionaries” who leave home and live in distant lands. Many well-intentioned believers feel that since they are not called to that life, offering prayers for missionaries and giving money to mission causes is sufficient.

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Yet the baby born in a manger would later tell his followers to “go therefore and make disciples of all the nations” (Matthew 28:19). This Great Commission was given to all believers without any qualification concerning special calling. All believers are given the responsibility of active participation in drawing all people back to God.

Romans 1:1-7

Paul clearly understood the missionary call that comes with acceptance of Jesus as Lord. In his letter to the Romans, he begins by identifying himself as a “bond-servant of Christ Jesus.” While a bond-servant is not a slave (at least not in the modern sense of that word), he is duty-bound to carry out the plans and wishes of his master.

Paul also saw himself as merely one in a long line of such servants of God dating back to the great prophets of the Old Testament. What Paul brought to this lineage was the next step in the revelation. While the prophets of old looked forward to God’s great day of salvation, Paul proclaimed that that day had arrived through the person of Jesus.

Through a relationship with Jesus, believers receive not only grace, but also a call to be apostles. Elsewhere, Paul refers to this calling as that of an ambassador (2 Corinthians 5:20). Such a call not only is to be a messenger who carries a particular message, but a representative who lives among the target audience and seeks to convey the message through both words and lifestyle in order to “bring about the obedience of faith” among the people.

Specifically, Paul saw his mission as being an apostle to the Gentiles; those who were not necessarily familiar with the beliefs, customs and practices of the Jews. The Christian church today, a predominantly gentile body, owes much of its existence to Paul’s fulfillment of that calling. That same mission was passed from Paul to those who he reached with the gospel. We are called not only to be recipients of God’s infinite grace, but also to be apostles of that grace to those who do not know him. Just as Paul, a Pharisaic Jew, was called to go to those who were different than himself, believers today are called to take the message to those who are different than us.

Romans 1:13-15

Not only did Paul see his mission to the gentiles as a calling, he also referred to it as an “obligation.” Yet for Paul, this was not burdensome. It was more of a driving force he could not ignore. Paul had a hunger that all of the people of the world should hear the gospel. This hunger compelled him to take long journeys that consumed years of his life and often put him in dangerous situations.

It was this drive that enabled him to persevere through persecutions. It was this “obligation” that led Paul to set his eyes on preaching the gospel in Rome and possibly Spain. Paul did not consider this call to be an apostle on mission to be a burden. The burden for Paul was the masses of people who

never had heard the message.

During this season, many of us will spend hours searching for the “right gift” for people on our list. What motivates us to devote such time and effort? That is the feeling of “obligation” Paul felt for people he had never met. That is the zeal with which we are each called to proclaim the gospel to all people through words and actions. What better gift could we give?

Romans 1:16-17

Many today fail to proclaim the gospel to those around them because they do not want to appear as a religious fanatic or some type of “Jesus freak.”

Paul here reminds us the gospel never should be something we are ashamed of. The gospel encapsulated the very power of God to meet the deepest needs of the human condition. While there are many good things that we can and should do to meet physical needs, sharing the gospel is the only thing we can do that may result in the eternal salvation of the person to whom we are ministering.

We need not be concerned about any possible reactions or responses to sharing the gospel. We only need to be certain we are being faithful to our calling to share and leave the results up to God. “The righteous man shall live by faith (v. 17). We are called to live in full reliance on God, knowing he will take care of us as long as we are faithful to fulfill our calling to be apostles on mission.

Discussion question

- What does being an apostle mean to you?

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