

Asking Our Hard Questions of the Bible

January 23, 2006

Mission Commissions and Having the Right Focus

- I. Introduction
 - A. Announcements
 1. Open with prayer
 2. Any new people? If so, summarize need to bring paper, pen, and Bible (various versions OK for comparison, but NRSV will be main one for reading, NASB for studying).
 3. Get list of names and how to contact (email preferred)
 4. 90 minutes on 4th Mondays at 7 p.m.
 5. Read passages (volunteers)
 - B. Does anyone have any questions for us to consider for next time?
 1. .
 2. .
 - C. As most of you know, I have been placing strong emphasis on the importance of considering the context of any passage of the Bible we are trying to understand.
 1. Today we will look at some passages that clearly show us the importance of two other critical principles that help us understand what the Bible is really saying, not just what we think it is saying.
 2. A common error we make is reading *into* the Bible meanings that we already have in our own heads—meanings we have unconsciously absorbed from our cultural world view. This is called *eisegesis* (reading into).
 3. If we are going to be able to understand what God has said to us, and therefor be able to live the way God wants us to, we need to figure out how to do *exegesis*, that is, “to read out from” the text.
 4. I have mentioned this a few times before, but it’s time again to go into some specifics on how we do that.
 - D. A question was brought up at the end of our last meeting back in November about Jesus’ commissioning of the disciples and sending them out.
 1. We are going to look at some passages to see what they say in and of themselves.
 2. But we will also be talking about how we figure out to whom a passage is directed and what its purpose is. In short, we will pay a lot of attention to figuring out its focus.
- II. The question was then, what does Jesus’ commissioning and sending out the disciples teach us about doing missionary work today?
 1. There are really two primary times we are told about that Jesus sent them out before his Resurrection.

Asking Our Hard Questions of the Bible

January 23, 2006

- a. Luke 9:1-11 (cf Matthew 10:1-15; Mark 6:7-12)
- b. Luke 10:1-12
2. And then there is one more time after his resurrection: Acts 1:7, John 20:21-22, Matthew 28:16-19
- B. One of the most common—*very* common—errors we make in interpreting what the Bible means is to read it as a sort of instruction book written **directly** to us.
 1. When we have this basic assumption (*hermeneutic*: methodology for interpreting the text), we think of each passage as either being direct instruction to us or as an example for us to emulate today in exactly the same way.
 2. While it is often good to follow such examples or instructions, it is not always so. Read examples and discuss briefly.
 - a. **Mt. 5:29-30** “Pluck out your eye.”
 - b. **Luke 18:22** “Sell all you have and give to the poor.”
 - c. **Eph. 5:24** “Wives submit to your husbands.”
 - d. **1st Timothy 5:23** “Drink a little wine for your stomach.”
 3. Sometimes instructions and examples must be understood in the cultural context of its time and place. (a, c) Then we can figure out the meaning for our own time and culture based on the same purpose/principle that was—and still is—behind them.
 - a. e.g., Mt 5:29-30 point is to take sin *very* seriously and do whatever it takes to get it out of our lives.
 - b. e.g., Eph 5:24 point (among others) is to not flaunt our freedom in Christ in such a way as to offend others (esp. non-believers) and thereby cause them to reject Christ.
 4. Sometimes they are related to a specific person and circumstance. (b, d) Again, we can figure out the meaning for us in the here-and-now when we understand what was behind it at the time it was written.
 - a. e.g., Luke 18:22 point is Jesus must be the primary commitment in our lives.
 - b. e.g., 1st Timothy 5:23 point is to take care of our health rather than hold onto some self-imposed “rule.”
 5. But many times we misunderstand what the Bible says simply because we get the focus wrong.
- C. The New Testament epistles/letters tell us a lot about Jesus, but much of their focus is directed towards Christians—folks like us—and are written to give specific instruction to churches and Christians in general. But the gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke, John) have a different and clearly stated focus.
 1. Look at **Matthew 1:1, 16-18a**. What is this gospel focused on?
 2. How about **Mark 1:1**?
 3. **John 20:30-31** and **John 21:25**?

Asking Our Hard Questions of the Bible

January 23, 2006

4. **Luke 1:1-4 and Act 1:1-3?**
 - D. So, while we can learn a lot about what God expects of us, are the gospels written primarily as instruction books for us? Or do they have a different purpose?
 1. Whenever we read the gospels, then, the first and most important question to ask is, "What does this tell me about Jesus?"
 2. There will always be at least some important implications for us, but that is NOT where we begin. We begin with Jesus.
- III. Now let's read our two passages on Jesus commissioning the disciples to go out on their own missionary journeys.
- A. We will use the Luke accounts for both since they are so close to each other and it makes our study a little easier.
 1. **Luke 9:1-6**
 2. **Luke 10:1-12**
 - B. First let's make a list on the board of the mission goals Jesus gave the disciples in each case. (1 person write on board; Some do mission 1, some mission 2)
 1. Mission 1 (Luke 9)
 - a. Drive out demons (9:1)
 - b. Cure diseases (9:1)
 - c. Preach the Kingdom of God (9:2)
 - d. Heal the sick (9:2; repeating b. above emphasizes and connects to both a. and c.)
 2. Mission 2 (Luke 10)
 - a. Heal the sick (v. 9)
 - b. Proclaim the Kingdom of God is near (v. 9)
 - c. Implied conflict with demons (v. 17)
 3. These mission goals are a pretty tall order. How did Jesus expect the disciples to accomplish them?
 - a. Luke 9:1 (Jesus gave them power and authority.)
 - b. Luke 10:16 (Implied that Jesus gave same power and authority again since he equates their mission with his, their power with his.)
 4. Now let's ask our basic question: What does this tell us about Jesus?
 - a. Jesus has power and authority over spiritual and physical enemies.
 - b. Jesus has power and authority to empower and authorize others.
 - c. Jesus wants his followers to do the kinds of things he does, but we can only do so if he gives us the power and authority.
 5. If we read this part as if it were written as instructions to us, what errors might we make?
 - a. Think that mission is for everyone to do.
 - b. Think that mission is always accompanied by miraculous signs.
 - c.

Asking Our Hard Questions of the Bible

January 23, 2006

- C. Let's continue by making a list of the specific instructions Jesus gave the disciples in each case for carrying out their mission. (Some do Mission 1, some Mission 2)
1. Mission 1 (Luke 9)
 - a. Take nothing for your journey, no staff, nor bag, nor bread, nor money—not even an extra tunic. (9:3)
 - b. Whatever house you enter, stay there, and leave from there. (9:4)
 - c. Wherever they do not welcome you, as you are leaving that town shake the dust off your feet as a testimony against them. (9:5)
 2. Mission 2 (Luke 10)
 - a. Carry no purse, no bag, no sandals. (10:4)
 - b. greet no one on the road. (10:4)
 - c. Whatever house you enter, first say, 'Peace to this house! (10:5) . . . Remain in the same house, eating and drinking whatever they provide, for the laborer deserves to be paid. Do not move about from house to house. (10:7)
 - d. But whenever you enter a town and they do not welcome you, go out into its streets and say, "Even the dust of your town that clings to our feet, we wipe off in protest against you. Yet know this: the kingdom of God has come near." (10:10-11)
- D. Now, let's consider the things that are basically the same in the two lists and what they tell us about Jesus.
1. Why did Jesus tell them to take nothing with them?
 - a. Makes them dependent on hospitality of the people.
 - b. Makes them dependent upon Jesus/God.
 - c. What does this tell us about Jesus? (Not force himself on anyone; wants us to rely on him in trust/faith.)
 2. What errors could we make if we took this as a directive to missionaries today?
 - a. Make homeless beggars out of missionaries?
 - b. .
 - 3.
 4. Jesus also told them to stay at whatever home into which they were welcomed. Any idea why?
 - a. Traveling religious teachers of various kinds were common. It was also common for them to get their income from the generosity of people they encountered. And, of course, the more people they stayed with, the more "gifts" they could count on.
 - b. The disciples were to be different. Their mission wasn't to get what they could, but to just have enough to live on and to give freely the message and healing that Jesus had sent them to give.

Asking Our Hard Questions of the Bible

January 23, 2006

- c. Again, this is not a once-and-for-all-time lesson about how we are to conduct missions, but a demonstration of the character of Jesus. What does this tell us about him?
 - 5. In our modern western culture, if we simply took this as an instruction for our style of missions, what could be the consequences?
 - a. Could limit mission to smaller group of people.
 - b. Could over-burden host families.
 - c. .
 - 6. The third instruction that is the same in both cases is to “shake the dust off your feet” as a “testimony” to those who reject the disciples. (Keep in mind that the people Jesus and the disciples were speaking to had been specifically prepared by God for thousands of years of their history to expect the Messiah and to know how to recognize him.) What does this tell us about Jesus?
 - a. Esp. in Mission 2, it is clear that there will be judgement for those who reject Jesus by rejecting the disciples.
 - b. Jesus offers himself to the rejecters as well as the receivers. The choice and responsibility are theirs.
 - c. When Jesus presents himself to people, it is serious and there is no guarantee it will be repeated!
 - d. .
 - 7. If we read this instruction to the disciples as a direct instruction to ourselves rather than a revelation about Jesus, how would our attitude about missions be different?
 - a. “Hit and run” evangelism; less persistent;
 - b. More likely to be quick to be judgmental.
 - c. .
- E. Now compare the differences in the two lists, and especially compare the introduction Jesus gave before each list. What is different?
 - 1. Two differences added in Luke 10.
 - 2. Jesus tells them, “Greet no one on the way.” Lk 10:4
 - 3. Jesus warns that the disciples are being sent like “sheep among wolves.” Lk 10:3
 - 4. Why the warnings? What has changed? Especially what does this say about how things have changed for Jesus?
- F. The key is the context. In this case that means we need to look at what happened *between* the two mission trips.
 - 1. What changed in between? (See NRSV for general headings)
 - a. Herod wonders who Jesus is 7-9
 - b. Feeding 5000 10-17
 - c. Peter says who Jesus is: Messiah 18-20

Asking Our Hard Questions of the Bible

January 23, 2006

- d. Jesus predicts his own death and resurrection 21-27
 - e. Transfiguration 28-36
 - f. Jesus heals boy with demon 37-43
 - g. Jesus predicts his own death and resurrection 43-45
 - h. Disciples argue over own ranking 46-50
 - i. Jesus rejected by Samaritan village; disciples want to destroy 51-56
 - j. Would-be disciples fall short 57-62
2. Observations of things that have happened in between.
- a. We did a previous study on the Transfiguration. Remember there had just been that amazing experience of the miraculous feeding of the 5000. Then Peter announced that Jesus is the Messiah/Christ. Everything was looking terrific, like smooth sailing, but Jesus had a rude awakening for them.
 - b. One of the key things that the disciples didn't quite get at the time was what was said in **9:31**. This was a warning of conflict to come.
 - c. Disciples failures (h, i, j above) reveal underlying theme of conflict.
 - d. Increasing opposition (d, g, i above), again the theme of conflict.
 - e. Heading toward Jerusalem (**9:31, 51, 53; 10:1** [implied]) meaning what? (The ultimate conflict and Jesus' death.)
- G. Given the new circumstances for Jesus, why have his mission instructions changed?
- 1. Lk 10:4 "greet no one on the way."
 - a. Just saying "hi" in passing is not what Jesus meant. Middle-eastern greetings could be very long. (Where going? Where from? Know anyone from those villages? Do we know any people, places in common? Shall we travel together? etc.)
 - b. Some commentaries say that it was because time was running short.
 - c. Given the context, it is more likely that there was a danger that the disciples would be thwarted by opposition than distracted by too much friendliness.
 - 2. Lk 10:3 adds warning about being sent like "sheep among wolves."
 - a. Here it is made very clear that the reception this time will be different than it was before (mission 1).
 - b. Now there is real danger for the disciples, though they haven't fully grasped it yet.
- H. The situation had changed even more drastically when Jesus later reminded them of their missionary journey: **Luke 22:20-40 (focus on v. 36)**
- 1. What was Jesus' point in reminding them of this?

Asking Our Hard Questions of the Bible

January 23, 2006

- a. So they would remember that Jesus had prepared the way for them then and could be trusted now.
 - b. .
 2. Why did he tell them they needed swords now?
 - a. Not to fight a battle, certainly since 2 swords were “enough.”
 - b. As he would later tell Peter, he could call down legions of angels to fight for him, so asking a couple of ex-fishermen to fight the Roman army doesn’t seem very likely! (Mt 26:53)
 - c. Rather this was a way to illustrate to them that they were entering into a time of grave danger and extreme opposition.
 3. How would knowing this help them if they were not expected to actually fight like an army?
 - a. When doctor or nurse gives a shot, why do they say, “This is going to pinch/sting?”
 - b. If we know in advance that (1) the one we trusted in the past did not fail us, (2) we trust the same one now, (3) and we are going to have some difficult/dangerous experience, then we can have more confidence that the difficulty is not something that is out of control.
 - c. We can continue to trust and endure the bad times knowing that things will someday change again for the better.
 4. Jesus is also reminding them that he had warned of difficulties even back then, just as he was now.
 5. If we were to take this instruction in Luke 22 as something for missionaries today, we would be sending them to Marine Corps boot camp instead of Bible Colleges and Seminaries. But that is not the focus. It’s not about us, it’s about Jesus.
 6. So what does all this tell us about Jesus?
 - a. Faithful in past and present, and therefore in the future.
 - b. Even when things are very bad it doesn’t mean that they are out of his control.
 - c. .
- IV. But after Jesus’ Resurrection the whole approach to missions is changed and we are given much more direct instructions.
- A. In **Matthew 10:5** (parallel passage to Luke 9) Jesus gave an instruction to the disciples that, to our ears, sounds unfair, at the very least. (Go only to Jews.)
 1. Why? **John 4:22** sums up what the whole of the Old Testament teaches. The Messiah/salvation is from the Jews. That is where his mission begins—among the people who have been prepared for centuries to receive it.
 2. The hospitality and anticipated welcome could only be expected from Jews who were looking for the Messiah.

Asking Our Hard Questions of the Bible

January 23, 2006

- B. If it had been Jesus' intention for Mt. 10:5 to be true always and everywhere, we would all be in big trouble.
1. So would the Apostle Paul. He, in fact, was a missionary specifically to the Gentiles.
 2. He had a very different approach to mission work than anything Jesus had said to the disciples in either Mission 1 or Mission 2.
 - a. **2nd Corinthians 11:9** Jesus told the disciples to carry nothing with them and to rely on their hosts. What did Paul do here? (Supplied by others from a different city.)
 - b. **2nd Thess 3:6-10** (cf 1st Thess 2:6-9) What was different in Paul's approach here? Why?
 - c. Paul was a Jew among Gentiles and in a foreign land and culture. His approach had to be different, but his message was the same.
- C. After his resurrection, Jesus' message was different, too.
1. The gospel of Jesus was no longer just for the Jews: **Acts 1:7-8**
 2. Jesus gave the Holy Spirit to empower those he sent: **John 20:21-22**
 3. And in the most well known passage of them all, we hear the resounding declaration from Jesus about who he is and, though he doesn't spell out *how* we are to do it, he makes it very clear what we are to do: **Matthew 28:16-19**
 4. The only question that remains for us, now and always, is "Are we doing what Jesus told us to do?"

V. Summary

- A. Our goal today was to learn what the Bible does/does not tell us about Christian missions and how knowing the focus of a passage can help us interpret it more faithfully.
1. Have we done that satisfactorily?
 2. Have these studies been helpful?
- B. How does what we have studied apply to each of us?
- C. What questions for next time?
- D. Any comments on our format or subject matter so far?
- E. Next meeting: Monday Feb. 27th, 7-8:30 p. m.
- F. Close in prayer
- G. **Archives of class notes can be found online at:**
www.fumcwa.org/classes/wdbsa