



The End of the Earth

The Scope, Power, and Commitment of God's Mission

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In this article Jay explores an alternative way of looking at God's mission, from the perspective of loving unity. Since the era of European exploration, the mission of God was increasingly perceived as expansionist—to 'claim territory' for God as the colonial adventurers and settlers did for their benefactors (usually their King/Queen or country). In contrast, the mission of God is to re-establish rulership where ownership already exists. Our role in that is to manifest the rule of God in our Jesus-following communities in such a way that we are witnesses of God's Kingdom reality in Christ. We do that through loving unity.

Kia tau te aroha noa ki a koutou me te rangimarie, he mea na te Atua na to mātou Matua, na te Ariki hoki, na Ihu Karaiti. (Grace and peace to you [all] from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ). Tihei Māori ora! Whakapaingia te Atua, to tatou Kai-unga ki te ao whānui. (Praise be to God, who sends us into the world).

1. Introduction

Tihei mauri ora. (It is the breath of life)

For this presentation, the breath of life comes to us from two New Testament passages: Acts 1:7-8 and John 17:18-25.

I will use these passages as interpretive keys that I think can unlock a fresh understanding of missions for the era ahead of us. I was forming these convictions prior to our current COVID-19 crisis but I am excited by what I think the Spirit is doing in our day to see God glorified in ALL the earth. I won't elaborate on that much more. Suffice it to say, I believe we're living in a very exciting time, a tragic time to be sure, but an exciting time where we will see God do wonders beyond imagining, to bring people into the Kingdom.

Picking just these two Scriptures, I want to tease out a classic three points this morning: The Scope, The Power and The Commitment required to witness to the ends of the earth.

2. The Scope

I've served in missions for almost 30 years and now share leadership responsibility between Missions Interlink, the missions alliance in Aotearoa New Zealand, and the World Evangelical Alliance's Mission Commission, the global alliance of national missions alliances, missions organisations and missionaries. My WEA role also puts me in charge of the missions and evangelism department of the World Evangelical Alliance.

The WEA is one of three major Christian alliances in the world, alongside the World Council of Churches and the Catholic Church. Four, if the Pentecostal World Fellowship distinguishes itself from the WEA. Of all these different flavours of Christianity (which comprise just under one third of the world's population) the WEA represents around 620 million Evangelicals worldwide.

World-wide. The very fact that we have Christ-worshipping communities in Aotearoa New Zealand is evidence of a promise fulfilled—here we are, at the ends of the earth, witnessing to the reality of Jesus.

Does that mean the job is done? Well, on face-value, yes. There is some sort of gospel witness in every part of the world. But that doesn't mean there is enough of a witness that the light of the Kingdom of God is able to impact the society around them. We have a hard-enough time influencing our own nation and Bible believing Christians in Aotearoa New Zealand comprise between 6 and 10% of the population here, depending on how you interpret the stats.

I have always found missions fascination with "the end" a curious thing. I'm not sure if you've noticed but over the past 50 years or so, a major driving factor in missions has been to establish a church amongst every people group in the world, based on the understanding that *then* the end will come. They have taken what Jesus meant as an indication of scope and made it a target. They have taken a promise and made it a task. And I don't think that's at all helpful.



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The lead-up to acts 1:7 is the exact same lead up to Matthew 24:14. The disciples want to know “when the end will come”. They’re like children in the back kicking the front seat, crying out “are we there yet?” Both times Jesus’ gives indications of the end in such a way as saying, “uh... nope”. Jesus is not saying go do it, he’s saying this *will* happen and he gives the scope: “all nations” (in Matthew 24:14 and 28:19), “all creation” (Mark 16:15), “ends of the earth” (Acts 1:8). These are scope indicators not task imperatives.

So, the ripple effect Jesus speaks of in Acts 1:8 is an inevitability not an activity. The “Therefore go” aspect of Matthew 28:19 is a release, not a command to do. You see, prior to his resurrection, Jesus restricted the disciples’ ministry to Israel (Matthew 10:5-6). After the resurrection the whole world was open to hear the good news that the Kingdom of God is here, and it is accessible through allegiance to Jesus the Christ.

So, let’s not get too hung up on location. God will move God’s people to do God’s will in God’s world. With all due respect to the passion of the late Keith Green, Jesus has not commanded us to “Go”, he commanded us to “love”. The going is incidental. It is simply a by-product of our obedience to Christ. But there is now no boundary to where He might lead us to go and love.

Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, the Ends of the Earth are simply another way of saying, “no limits”. That’s not to invalidate other interpretations of what they may signify, but I want to caution us against viewing the scope as a target so we can somehow “hasten Christ’s return”. That’s the Father’s prerogative, not ours. The end will come when all these things have happened, not because we’ve made them happen. So, where does that leave us? Let’s move from the inevitable scope of gospel spread, to the power of gospel witness.

3. The Power

Acts 1:8, “You will receive power, when *the Holy Spirit* comes upon you”. John 17:22, “I have given them the *glory* you gave me”, and in verse 23, “that you *love* them as much as you *love* me”. Again, in verse 24, “the *glory* you gave me because you *loved* me.” Then in the Acts passage, “You will be my *witnesses*” and in John “Then *the world will know...* then *the world will believe*”.

I want to counterpoint these two narratives, to place them side by side because I believe each of these passages are saying essentially the same thing. The glory that the Father gave Jesus and that Jesus gave us is a revelation of the love of the Father made manifest by the power of the Holy Spirit, which is such a witness to the world that they will know and believe that the Father lovingly sent the Son.

Let me say this again...

- The glory that the Father gave Jesus
- and that Jesus gave us
- is a revelation of the love of the Father
- made manifest by the power of the Holy Spirit
- which is such a witness to the world
- that they will know and believe
- that the Father lovingly sent the Son
- And as the Father the Son, so He sends us.

Ladies and gentlemen, boys and girls, I give you the mission of God.

We have made such a big deal of going out into the world to try and convince people that Jesus is Lord by our words and compelling arguments, that we have forgotten what the Father sent the Son for—loving unity. Our words inviting people into the open Kingdom of God, while important and necessary, are only as effective as those people seeing the love of God at work in our fellowship with one another. Do not underestimate the power that the Holy Spirit enables in us to love. The world is desperate to see it. For all the controversies of the past 50 years or so concerning the ministry of the Holy Spirit, we too easily forget that the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of love enlivened in us, gives us the power to love and fulfil God’s mission.

You see, *this* is the glory of the Father. *this* is the objective, or task, of missions that glorifies God in *all* the earth. Not to make converts by our compelling arguments, but to make disciples by our loving lives. This is the power that enables us to live out the Commitment.

We’ve got the scope, all the earth; we’ve got the power, the love of Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit; let us now turn to the commitment aspect as I conclude.

4. The Commitment

Somewhat ironically, as a leader in global missions, I don’t like the term, “The Great Commission”. It’s an invention that emerged in the age of colonial European expansion and I think it carries unhelpful colonialist overtones. As I mentioned earlier, the “go” and “all nations” are more about release and scope than activity. The Kingdom of God is not something we expand or extend. We don’t take territory for God with the gospel. God already owns all the world. The objective of missions is to reveal that fact to the inhabitants who are, effectively, squatting by not acknowledging the owner as their Lord. Missions is should be viewed as a reclamation project not a domination one. But I digress...

Post-resurrection, we are authorised to go wherever the Spirit leads us. The imperative in Matthew 28:18 is on the “make disciples”, which, in the words of Jesus in John, equates to “make them one”. This is our Great Commitment. Let me explain...

As the Father sent Jesus into ‘the world’, so Jesus sends us into ‘the world’. In our John 17 passage, that sending is completely immersed in loving unity—to be one as Jesus and the Father are one. A Celtic knot of unbreakable relationship, empowered by the Spirit of love. To be, in the words of Matthew 28:19, baptized into the relationship that the name of the Holy Three represents. To learn all that Christ commanded us, which was? Love. He commanded us to love. Love is the law we are to obey—all of us who come to know Christ, without exception.

And the outcome of this loving witness, wherever we happen to find ourselves in the world? That those around us, i.e. “the world”, will know *and* believe that God sent the Son, in love.

Brothers and sisters, when we love one another such that we are intimately and indivisibly connected in

Let Us Love

And so I close with the words of the beloved Apostle John, “Dear friends, let us love one another” (1 John 4:7). For this is how we bear witness to God’s glory at the ends of the earth

concern for one another, in forgiving one another, in making way for one another, in not considering ourselves better than others, but choosing to serve one another—this kind of loving unity is our missional responsibility. Who wouldn’t want to join such a community of faith?

It is possible. The Holy Spirit is ready and waiting to make it so. Our *willingness* to be disciples, to submit to God, and to love one another is often the biggest hindrance. Father, not our will but yours be done.

Why do I believe God will do wonders beyond imagining to bring people into the Kingdom? Because I believe we will see such an outpouring of love amongst each other as the days draw darker (regardless of our people, tribe, language or nation), this unity will be such that the world will not be able to ignore it. Our care for one another will be so obvious that they will have to know and believe that God lovingly sent the Son. They may not necessarily follow the Son, but they won’t be able to deny the power made available to us because of our relationship with the Creator of the universe, the great reconciler and King.