

MOVED

MOVED BY GOD

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As a Bible College lecturer, one of the things I hope my students learn is to think biblically. In other words, to consider what the Word of God has to say in relation to their everyday circumstances and situations. **The foundation for that sort of thinking, of course, is the character and activity of God as revealed in the Bible. And the central activity of God in the biblical narrative is the redemption and restoration of the world; in a word, 'mission'.**

This means mission is not some extracurricular activity for those who don't get into worship or teaching. Mission is the primary activity of God's people in response to his initiative. It is the actual heart of God, as revealed in the Bible. It has always been about the world.

In the beginning, when God created the world and everything in it, he gave humanity a unique position. Humanity was the pinnacle of his amazing creation. God's commitment to creation becomes especially evident after the fall, when, instead of abandoning or destroying his people, he sets about to restore the relationship. The story of restoration begins in earnest with the call of Abraham. God promised Abraham that he would become the father of a great nation so that through him all the peoples on the earth would be blessed. Fast forward four hundred years and God's promise of innumerable descendants has been fulfilled in the nation of Israel. **In their worship, in their homes, in their care for the poor and marginalised, in every aspect of their lives, the people of Israel were to be an example of what it meant to live in relationship with the one true God. This wasn't just for their sake; it was for the sake of the nations. Here, the entire story of the Bible begins to come into focus and reveal his mission-minded nature.**

The Old Testament contains many examples of God's people living faithfully, along with reminders that God's plan ultimately included the nations. Like Rahab, the brothel owner from Jericho who hears about God's miracles, hides the spies and is incorporated into the people of God. Or Ruth, the widow from Moab, who shows love for her mother-in-law Naomi, and becomes the ancestor of King David. Or Naaman, the Syrian commander who hears of God's power, is healed, turns from ancestral religion, and takes home two donkey-loads of dirt in order to worship God on 'home soil'! **These foreigners, and countless others, are not born into God's 'royal priesthood' but are included in his kingdom. It's all part of the plan!**

Unfortunately, the Israelites didn't always live faithfully. They often lost sight of who they were called to be and instead of being an influence to the nations, they were influenced by them. Despite this, God was relentless. **His intention, his purpose and perseverance were unshaken. He continually called his people back to faithful living in order that they might be the example to the nations of what true restored relationship with the creator might look like.**

In the New Testament, God's intent to redeem and restore relationship with all the nations of the world is taken to a new level. When God stepped onto earth in human form he showed just how committed and passionate he was about his mission. While Jesus didn't stray physically far from Judea, his ministry certainly wasn't confined to the Jews. He healed and interacted with people from the nations. He showed love and compassion to those who were outsiders. He taught that "many would come from the east and the west and will take their place at the feast in the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 8:11) and that in his death and resurrection he would draw all people to himself. **And as he returned to heaven he commanded his disciples, and subsequently the early church and those that come after them, to go to all the world with the same good news.**

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The rest of the New Testament is the continuing story of God's mission; as the early church came to grips with the full implications of a mission that extended beyond their own faith communities to the nations and peoples around them. The story of Peter and Cornelius in Acts is one of my favourites. When the Holy Spirit, the sign of the new life in Jesus, is poured out not only on the Jews but on the Gentiles, the nations, everyone was astonished. After all that Jesus did and taught, they were still amazed at the extent of God's commitment to mission! **They really were God's witnesses to Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria and to the ends of the earth.** Paul's call on the Damascus road and his subsequent missionary journeys were all about taking the gospel to the nations. And in this he wasn't alone. His letters contain references to Timothy, Silas and Priscilla, people who worked alongside him as they spread the good news.

Finally in Revelation, when John describes in a vision what it will all be like – of our shared destination and the culmination of God's plan – we see a vision of every tribe and every tongue and every nation worshiping together. It is a humbling truth and an amazing privilege that we, too, are caught up in this story. As followers of Jesus, we are invited to join God's mission and carry on the blessing to all nations. **The promise to Abram way back at the beginning is still being fulfilled today. We are commanded, we are instructed, but hopefully we are moved to join in, because it's part of our identity. It's part of who we are as God's people. Through us, you and me, the nations of the earth will be blessed, as they hear and experience God's love.**

So when we're talking about mission, we're not talking about an obscure subplot of the biblical narrative. We're talking about the very heart of God's story. Therefore, mission can't really be condensed to a few focus Sundays in the church calendar, or siphoned off to a couple of electives at Bible College, or even crossed off when we go on a short-term mission trip!

Mission is what it's all about. The entire Bible is about mission. It describes the character and activity of God in this world and moves us, his people, to take up that same mission to the nations.