

## MISSIONAL CHURCH Treasure in Clay Jars

### *Lesson One: Biblical/Theological Principles*

#### **Outcome Objectives:**

1. Learners will become familiar with the biblical/theological foundations of the mission of God (*missio Dei*) and reign of God as it is revealed in the Bible
2. Learners will explore how one's biblical/theological foundation of church (ecclesiology) shapes the daily living out of God's mission in the world.
3. Learners will explore what these biblical/theological foundations mean for evangelism and interaction with culture.

#### **Introduction:**

1. Teacher will emphasize the importance of understanding that mission begins with God. Notice examples from Scripture that involve God's initiative to work salvation:
  - a. Genesis 12:1-9 – God takes the initiative to work salvation by calling Abraham and sending him to Canaan. Notice the theme of calling and sending. This will be typical of the Biblical examples of God's missional initiative.
  - b. Exodus 3:7-12 – God calls Moses and sends him in mission to Egypt. Notice how other nations (Canaan, Egypt) and not just Israel are the focus of God's mission. The mission of God has implications for all people.
  - c. Luke 10 – The disciples are gathered up and involved in God's mission. Notice that mission begins by bidding God to send out harvesters. Notice that more occurs in the mission of the 70 than what Jesus commissions them to do (v. 17 – “in your name even the demons submit to us”)
  - d. John 20:19-23 – Jesus sends the apostles just as he was sent by the Father. (see v. 21). Notice how God's initiative involves salvation and sending.
2. Teacher will discuss Biblical understandings of the kingdom of God.
  - a. Teacher may want to address assumptions about kingdom. It is important to recognize that most Americans are not familiar with the implications of living within a kingdom. It may also be helpful to point out that the term “kingdom of God” is often interchangeable with the terms “reign of God” or “rule of God.”
  - b. Notice the verbs that Scripture associates with our relationship to the kingdom<sup>1</sup>:
    - i. We are to *receive* the reign of God like a little child (Mk. 10:15; Lk. 18:17)
    - ii. We *inherit* the kingdom (Mt. 25:34; 1 Cor. 6:9-10; Gal. 5:21)

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<sup>1</sup> James V. Brownson, et al. *Stormfront: The Good News of God* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2003): 40.

- iii. We *enter* the reign of God (Mt. 5:20; 7:21; 18:3; 19:23-24; Mk 9:47; 10:23-25)
    - iv. We are never mentioned as building or establishing the kingdom. That is God's work. (see Mark 4).
  - c. Receiving the kingdom involves accepting the generosity of the king. Inheriting the kingdom involves becoming an heir; that is a member of the king's house. Entering a kingdom involves conforming to the way of life established by the king.
  - d. The kingdom of God is not territory that belongs to God as opposed to territory yet unclaimed for God. The identification of kingdom with political territory is a concept rooted in Christendom rather than Scripture (see Lesson 2). According to Scripture, God has exalted Christ and made him Lord over all creation (Acts 2:32-36; Phil. 2:9-10; Col. 1:15-20). Those who proclaim the coming of the kingdom reign of God are witnesses to what God is doing in creation to establish his rule and to make his rule known.
- 3. Teacher will indicate the importance of the lordship of Christ. Like the concept of kingdom, this concept is often not fully appreciated.
  - a. The lordship of Christ is often reduced to individual concerns. When salvation is reduced to individualistic concerns, Christ is regarded as personal savior, or "Lord of my life." While individual confession of Christ as Lord is certainly not wrong, it is a limited perspective, and the church tends to ignore that God has exalted Christ as Lord universally. For example, Peter asserts that God has made Jesus Lord regardless of the acceptance or rejection of the crowd. He calls them to repent of their rejection of the objective reality of Jesus' lordship and not simply acceptance of a subjective experience of that lordship (Acts 2:36-41). When salvation is reduced to an individual activity, then the full perspective that embraces the whole of creation is lost.

## Exploration

1. Teacher will explore the relationship between church and mission, keeping in mind the Biblical foundations established about mission: a) mission is God's initiative, b) we are those who have received, inherited, and entered into the kingdom of God, and c) God has exalted Christ as Lord over all creation.
  - a. *Exploration Strategy for Teacher:* Read John 17:14-18 as a class. Before the reading, prepare the class to listen closely to what Jesus is saying about the relationship of God's mission, the church, and the world. After the reading, you may want to invite the class give their responses and write these on a board. As you invite and gather responses ask the class if this reading challenged any of their assumptions about the relationship of mission, church, and world. Alternatively, you could ask the class to group into sets of two or three for a few minutes and discuss what they heard. After this, select a few

individuals to give responses and ask if others had that reaction. Emphasize responses that support the following material.

- b. *See the diagram in Appendix 1 for a visual of the following notes:* Begin with God and the world. Mission is more than just an adjunct activity of the church. Mission cannot be reduced to obedience to a command to evangelize. God sends Christ and Christ sends his church (John 17:18; John 20:22 – Trinitarian basis of mission). There is an effort on the part of God and his people to reconcile and be reconciled.
  - c. God rules over the entire world despite the fact that some reject that rule. The church is formed and made visible because God gathers the church from the world. A called out assembly and community that becomes a sign to the world of kingdom. This church comes up from the culture, but is transformed within the culture – and at times it is transforming the culture. Since it remains in the world (though not of the world) it would not be accurate to draw a tight circle. Instead, this mission-shaped community exists in the world and has a dynamic relationship with the world that is in synch with God’s relationship with the world. Thus the church is turned “inside out” and sent out to make God’s presence in the world known. What you get is a centered set (not a bounded set) that is centered on God’s presence and activity.
  - d. *Exploration Strategy for Teachers:* Using the Diagram
    - i. Ask the class if this diagram helps them to understand the relationship of God’s mission, the world, and the church. Ask them if they would change it somehow.
    - ii. Ask the class if this diagram challenges some of our assumptions about your congregation’s involvement in mission (i.e. Is mission just an adjunct program of the church or is it part of discipleship and life together?). Ask if it challenges certain assumptions about your congregation’s relationship with the world.
    - iii. How does our view of evangelism change when we realize that we are not only evangelists, but also the evangelized? How does our view of mission change when we understand that we are gathered up in mission and responsible for acting missionally rather than initiating mission?
2. The mission of God is logically prior to the church. Explore this by considering two phrases: “The Church has a Mission” vs. “The Mission has a Church.”
- a. *Exploration Strategy for Teachers:* Write both phrases on a board. Ask the class to react to both phrases before engaging in discussion. Which phrase seems more natural to us? Why? In each phrase, how does the first noun define the second? See additional questions connected to each phrase below:

- b. The Church has a Mission. How do we often describe the mission of the church? Mission statements? The great commission? Church work?
  - c. The Mission has a Church: Based on what we have studied this far, does it logical to assume that mission shapes the church? What texts support this view?
3. Consider the implications of each view on the relationship between church and mission:
- a. When we say that “the church has a mission,” we tend to view the church as a sort of machine that comes in a kit so that when we assemble it properly according to the instructions and turn on the power it goes to work. But the Bible never pictures the church as an independent institution that churns out a product or repeats a task under its own power. The biblical view of the church is not a static organization that determines its own mission. Rather, God has a mission in this world and God is about his mission; he is calling and sending people caught up in that mission and they are the church.
  - b. Exploration Strategy for Teachers: Ask the class to name parables that describe the work of God in building the kingdom. Examine some of these parables and consider what the role of the church is in God’s in-breaking kingdom. Alternatively, you may want to list the parables mentioned below or pass out index cards to readers with the Scripture reference. After reading each parable ask the class to comment on what is being said about kingdom, world, and church.
  - c. The biblical view of the church is that it is the result of and witness to God’s mission: In the Bible, the followers of Christ are called “The Way.” (Acts 9:2) The church is the transformation of the old humanity into the new humanity (Eph. 2:15). The church is the result of God’s Activity – we are the fish caught up in the dragnet (Mt. 13:47-50), we are the sheaves of wheat gathered in harvest (Mt. 13:24-30; see also Luke 10), we are the mustard tree sown by the sower (Mk 4:30-32), we are persecuted believers on the run who tell the story that changes the world (Acts 8).
  - d. The mission of God is a tidal wave breaking onto the shores of earth and the church is caught up in it. The mission of God is like a storm front moving into this world. The church is like a pile of leaves or a drift of snow gathered up by the wind. (See John 3:8) We are the visible evidence of God’s invisible activity in the world. The mission of God has a church.

### **Response**

1. In this closing section, it is important to encourage the learners to apply the biblical principles to church life. Have the learners consider the real implications of the foundational concepts that have been discussed.

2. Divide the class into three groups. Have each group consider one of the following three sets of questions:
  - a. Group 1 – If mission begins with God, how does this challenge and shape our understanding of evangelism? What is our role in evangelism? What Scriptures inform your answers? How will you live out this understanding of evangelism and God’s mission?
  - b. Group 2 – What does our understanding of God’s reign (kingdom) have to do with our understanding of mission? What does it mean to live under the reign of God? What Scriptures inform your answers?
  - c. Group 3 – Many of us have heard the statement “Jesus is Lord of My Life.” What would it mean for your group/congregation to make the statement “Jesus is Lord of *Our* Life!” How does it change our view of the relationship of church and world to recognize that Christ is Lord over all? What Scriptures inform your answers?
3. Allow a specified time for group discussion then bring the three groups together. Ask each group to summarize their discussions. Challenge each group to discuss the real implications (“What are these texts challenging us to do/to be?”)
4. The teacher should write the important observations on a board and then note the common themes that come from the independent discussions of the three groups. What do these common themes suggest for living faithfully in God’s mission?
5. Conclude with a prayer for the congregation to continue maturing into the mission of God.

**Appendix 1**  
**God's Mission in the World**  
**Gathering and Sending the Church**

