

“AS MY FATHER HAS SENT ME, I AM SENDING YOU”

Introduction

I have been informed that the theme for this conference is based upon the key scripture that says: *“As you sent me into the world, I have sent them into the world”* (John 17:18). This statement was a prayer to the Father found in Jesus’ great high priestly prayer on the Thursday evening just a few hours before he was arrested. He obviously was crucified the next day. So this was one of the last prayers that Jesus ever made.

Interestingly, this was not a request kind of prayer. Rather it was a simple statement that Jesus made to his father and he was concluding his ministry on this earth. It was more of a report than a request. In fact, starting from 17:6 through verse 19, Jesus is giving something of a report about the disciples he has been training. There are a few “requests” through in but it is primarily a review or summary of his activities with his disciples.

Jesus gives a slight variation of this statement to his disciples four days later. Jesus had been arrested that night; he was crucified and was buried the next day. We know that he arose from the dead on Sunday morning. Jesus appeared to several people on that resurrection morning. During that evening—Sunday evening, while ten of the disciples were gathered together, Jesus appeared to them. He showed them his hands and they were overjoyed to see him. At this point Jesus said to them, *“Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you.”* (John 20:21). That which he had spoken to his father in the presence of his disciples four days earlier, he now speaks to his disciples in the presence of his father.

What a person says near the end of his life is usually important. Jesus is concluding his earthly ministry. This statement was first made about 18 hours before he died and was one of the last things that he said on this earth. The statement was made the second time 16 or 18 hours after Jesus had been raised from the dead and was one of the first things he said after his resurrection. Such a statement repeated like this in these places requires our attention.

I will now go backwards a bit and look at this statement in a broader context. I am going to take some time to think about the conference theme during this session. After that I am going to look at the implications of this theme in the life of Jesus, in the life of Paul and in our own lives. I am going to begin with an explanation of some general principles of the way God works on this earth.

Principles of God’s Work (How does God work on this earth?)

Whenever God works on this earth, he always works through human beings.

For reasons we do not fully understand, God has chosen to work on this earth through human beings. Nearly everything God ever did on this earth, he has done so through the work of human beings. For example, when he wanted to destroy the earth and start over, he required an old man to work for 120 years to build a boat and round up all those animals in order to preserve a remnant of the animals and people on this earth. If I were God and had all the power that he had, I could have done it much quicker and easier.

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If we move forward and even look at the miracles that God has done on this earth, we will see that humans were always involved.

- The greatest miracle in the Old Testament is the crossing of the Red Sea. The waters did not open until Moses stretched out the rod.
- The first miracle that Jesus did was the turning of the water into wine. It did not happen until the servants went and got the water and distributed it to the guests.
- The most popular miracle of Jesus—at least the only one found in all four gospels is the feeding of the 5,000. Jesus could have created an instant meal in front of every person there but he did not do that. Jesus required the disciples to do research; organize the people; take the food to them and clean up afterwards. It was only after the disciples had done their little bit of work that Jesus blessed their weak and imperfect efforts and did the miracle.

Therefore, if God is going to build a nation on this earth, he is going to work through human beings to do it.

Whenever God works on this earth, he works the hard way, the slow way, the difficult way, the progressive way, the way that is opposite of the way we would do things.

If I had wanted to destroy the earth and start over, I could have done it much quicker than God did it. If I had wanted to create a nation, I could have done it very quickly. I am an American. I believe in the most efficient use of resources and time. However, it seems obvious to me that God is not an American. He does not do things the way that we do them. He does not seem to be very efficient with his resources at times. God almost seems to enjoy putting obstacles in the way of his people who are trying to do his work.

There are many examples. When God wanted to preserve a nation from destruction from a famine, God went to a lot of trouble to get Joseph down to Egypt and then kept the people down there in captivity for 400 years. When God wanted to prepare a prophet for Israel, he selected a barren woman to be his mother. Had I been God, I could have done things much more efficiently. Have you ever noticed that when God wants to prepare a special person, he selects the mother of the person to be an old lady or a barren lady or, in the case of Jesus, a virgin?

Those who were going to do the work of God will have to pass through many difficulties in life. Things will usually start small and go slow. It will usually be a long time before there is any success.

The following two verses illustrate this point very well.

- *“He told them another parable: “The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed, which a man took and planted in his field. Though it is the smallest of all your seeds, yet when it grows, it is the largest of garden plants and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and perch in its branches,” (Matthew 13:31-32)*
- *He told them still another parable: “The kingdom of heaven is like yeast that a woman took and mixed into a large amount of flour until it worked all through the dough.” (Matthew 13:33)*

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These two parables illustrate the way God does his things on this earth. He does things the hard way, the slow way, the difficult way, the way that is different than the way we do things.

If you do not understand these two principles, you will not be able to fully appreciate the Bible and, in fact, you will be confused about doing the Lord’s work.

Description of the Drama of Redemption

I will now attempt to describe the Bible in the form of a drama.

A Word About Dramas

Dramas are made up of acts and scenes. If the Bible were a drama, it would be made up of three major acts with dozens of scenes. In ancient dramas, the producers of the drama would often send someone out on the stage to read a statement that would “set the stage.” In other words, it would provide the audience with enough background information that the audience understand who the main characters were and enough of the context that they would understand what was going on in Act I, Scene 1. This was called the prologue. It is still done at times today but most of the time today, we will put that information in a written form in the program.

If the Bible were a drama, Genesis 1-11 is the prologue. The drama has not really started. The narrator has come out on the stage and given us the basic facts that you will need to know to be able to understand the first scene.

- God created the world and everything in it.
- The world fell into sin with the consequence that the people were scattered all over the world.
- The world got so bad that God attempted to correct it on one occasion by sending a flood to destroy the corrupt human race.
- Unfortunately, that solution really did not solve the problem of sin and corruption in the human world so the Lord decided to try another method.
- This corruption began to spread after the Tower of Babel

A long list of names are given which eventually leads to a man named Terah who became the father of Abram and the grandfather of Lot. They were cattle farmers who were from Ur of the Chaldees, which is in the modern country of Iraq.

That is the background. That is the information you have to know to be able to appreciate the beginning of the drama. Now the rest of the Bible is going to be a description of the unfolding drama of redemption.

Original Promise

The statement about the Father sending Jesus and Jesus sending his disciples is a fulfillment of a promise that Jesus gave in Genesis 12:1-3:

The LORD had said to Abram, "Leave your country, your people and your father's household and go to the land I will show you. "I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. I will bless

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those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you.”

This statement stands at the beginning of what God is doing on this earth.

Act I, Scene 1

The curtain opens on Act I, Scene 1. Here is Abram out in the bush. We are not given all the details as we are later given the details of God speaking to Moses. However, we may assume that the communication was in a similar dramatic form. The Lord speaks to Abram and makes the statement quoted above. We can divide the statement many ways but it appears to be divided into two general parts:

- God promises to make a great nation out of Abram: *“I will make you into a great nation.”*
- God promises to make Abram a blessing to all the people of the earth. He says, *“I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you.”* Actually, the Lord makes several statements here but the summary of it all is that God is going to make Abraham a blessing to all the people on the earth.

After God makes that speech, the curtain closes on Act I, Scene 1.

Act I; Scene 2

The curtain opens and we see Abram with all his possessions packed up on the backs of his cattle and camels. We read,

So Abram left, as the LORD had told him; and Lot went with him. Abram was seventy-five years old when he set out from Haran. ⁵ He took his wife Sarai, his nephew Lot, all the possessions they had accumulated and the people they had acquired in Haran, and they set out for the land of Canaan, and they arrived there” (Genesis 12:4-5).

Remember God promised to make a great nation out of Abram. When he got to the land of Canaan, had God fulfilled that promise to make a great nation out of him? Not yet.

So that we will know when God has fulfilled his promise to make a great nation, we need to identify the characteristics of a nation. What are the characteristics of a nation?

- Land
- People
- Laws/Government
- Leader

When Abram got to Canaan, he had the land but not enough people to be considered a nation.

Subsequent Scenes in Act I

There was a famine in Canaan so Abram went to Egypt. This appears to be a step backward. They have left their land that God has given them. Abram and his nephew, Lot,

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separate, appearing to even weaken the chances of God creating a great nation. Lot and his family are attacked by other tribes and carried away to the north. Abraham has to go rescue him. These scenes suggest something else that we need to interject here.

Abram was married to an old woman, beyond the age of child-bearing. Have you ever noticed that when God wanted to prepare a special person, he would select as the mother an old woman or a barren woman or in the case of Jesus, a virgin? We know the drama associated with getting a descendant for Abraham. We eventually see a small amount of progress when Abraham’s grandson, Jacob has 12 sons. But that is still far from a nation.

The nation building seems to go backward again when the children of Abraham all go down to Egypt. They have now even lost their land. When we come to the end of Genesis, is there a nation yet? It has been almost 200 years since God made the promise to build a great nation out of Abram. There are only about 70 people and they are all living in a foreign land.

Note the beginning of Exodus: *“Now Joseph and all his brothers and all that generation died, but the Israelites were fruitful and multiplied greatly and became exceedingly numerous, so that the land was filled with them”* (Exodus 1:6-7). It is estimated that two to three million eventually left Egypt to go back to Canaan. That means there is remarkable progress. There is now a large enough group of people to make up a nation.

In the early part of Exodus, is there a nation yet? No, the promise to build the nation has not yet been fulfilled but there is progress.

Starting in Exodus 20:1-17, we read about the giving of the Law, which not only includes the Ten Commandments but a large portion of Leviticus and Deuteronomy. The Law is essential to forming a successful nation. However, having a law does not necessarily make a nation. At the end of the Pentateuch, though there has been a lot of progress, God’s promise to make a great nation out of Abraham has still not been fulfilled. Joshua leads people into the land of Canaan. So, now the people are in back in their home land?

Is there a nation yet? Not really. We know this because of the Book of Judges. Throughout this last section of Judges, there is a reoccurring theme found in one form or another four times in the last five chapters of the book (Judges 17:6; 18:1; 19:1). In fact, the book concludes with the refrain, *“In those days Israel had no king; everyone did as he saw fit”* (Judges 21:25).

Eventually, Samuel anointed King Saul who became the king over Israel. And when Saul became a king, finally everything was in place.

- They had plenty people.
- They had their land.
- They had their laws and government in place.
- They had a leader that would keep them going.
- They had become a nation.

Amazingly, it was almost a thousand years from the time God had promised he was going to make a great nation until the time that God actually fulfilled that promise. Act I continues until the kingdom reached its peak under the administrations of David and Solomon.

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Act II

Act II, Scene 1 opens with Rehoboam meeting with his advisors about how he should run the kingdom. We know that story very well. From this point onwards, the kingdom starts going downhill. We will not take time to go through the various steps and scenes but Act II basically covers the rest of the Old Testament. It is largely a description of the deterioration and almost destruction of the powerful nation that God made.

Interim

Often in a drama, there is a brief interlude or intermission so the audience can take a little break and the players in the drama can get some rest. In the case of the drama of the Bible, there is a 400 year intermission.

Act III

The curtain opens on Acts III, Scene 1. Here is an old priest doing his work in the Temple when an angel appears to him, telling him that he is going to become a father, even in his old age. Another scene comes along when the angel of the Lord speaks to a young virgin girl, informing her that she is going to become the mother of the Messiah. Eventually the child is born and grows up. The curtain opens at a wedding feast and we see Jesus performing his first miracle. Jesus continues his ministry over the next three years.

There is one scene in this drama that is worth noting. After Jesus had been with his disciples at least two years and was somewhat within sight of the end of his ministry, he took his disciples on a little tour up north of Galilee for one last time of being alone with them. Jesus was near Caesarea Philippi and sat down beside a little river one day and asked his disciple who they thought he was. Various disciples gave various answers.

- Some thought he was Elijah returned in the flesh.
- Some thought he was John the Baptist.
- Some thought he was some other prophet.

Jesus wanted to be more specific and asked them who they thought he was. Peter replied, *“You are the Christ, the Son of the living God”* (Matthew 16:16). Jesus was very happy and said to Peter, *“Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by man, but by my Father in heaven.”*¹⁸ *And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it”* (16:17-18).

Note that Jesus makes one very interesting statement here. He says, *“I will build my church?”* Does this suggest anything to us? Does this remind us of anything? This reminds me of the Genesis 12 passage when God said to Abram, *“I will make of you a great nation . . . and all of the people of the earth will be blessed through you.”* Here Jesus is making another promise. He is promising to build his church? How did God build the nation of Israel?

- He did so through human beings.
- He did so the hard, difficult, slow, painful way.

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I would guess that Jesus is going to build his church the same way. He is going to build his church with human beings and it is going to be hard, slow, painful and difficult.

Purpose of the Drama

Before we complete this survey, let us think for just a moment about the purpose of this great drama. Remember, God promised to build a great nation out of Abraham and make him a blessing to all the peoples of the earth. Jesus promised that he was going to build his church and the gates of hell could not prevail against it. What was the purpose of the nation of Israel and what was the purpose of the church? What was the purpose of the building of the nation of Israel? As strange as it may seem, it had one basic purpose—to provide the one who was to be the Savior of the world.

Why did God take so long to do it and go through so much trouble to do this? I don't know but it is consistent with the way he does his things on this earth. Remember, God does things the hard way, the slow way, the difficult way, the painful way, the way that seems to be opposite of the way man would do things.

What was and is the purpose of this second body that Jesus came to build? It is to spread the news that the Savior has come to this world. If the Savior of the world has actually come to this world, there must be some mechanism to make sure the whole world learns about the Savior. The method that Jesus chose is a bit clumsy and slow. However, it is consistent with the way that God does things.

The Major Scene

Now, let us return to the text that you have chosen to be the major theme of this conference. Jesus is just about to complete his ministry on this earth. He has died on the cross to provide salvation for humanity. He has arisen from the dead, thus showing that the sacrifice has been accepted by God. He has returned to the earth to spend just a little more time with his disciples before permanently ascending to heaven. It is in this context that Jesus says to his disciples, *“As the Father has sent me, I am sending you.”*

In these two statements we see something of the purpose for each of the two major bodies that God used during this drama. This statement looks two different ways: First, it looks backwards. Jesus said, *“As the Father has sent me.”* This is a summary of the Old Testament, Acts I and II. All that we saw in the Old Testament was a preparation for God sending the Savior to the world.

Second, Jesus turns and looks forward. He says, *“I am sending you.”* This represents everything about Christianity from that point onward.

- This is what the book of Acts is all about.
- This is what the epistles are all about.
- This is what all of church history has been about.
- This is what the SIM mission is all about.

All that we have done in the name of Jesus for the past 200 years has been in fulfillment to that simple statement that Jesus was sending us to this world.

Application to Missionaries

God’s Work is not Going to be Done Quickly.

The drama I told you about took a long time and is still going on. It took a thousand years before God fulfilled his promise to make a great nation. It has taken 2000 years and Jesus is still building his church. Few if any projects that you know about sprang up overnight. Certainly SIM, which has been one of the most effective missions organizations in the twentieth century, was not developed overnight. Have you noticed that you never read any missionary biographies of short-term missionaries? It takes years to build a lasting ministry.

What does this mean? You should prepare yourself for a long ministry. The most effective ministry is where you go somewhere and stay and make a contribution over a lifetime. You are not going to make too much lasting impression by bouncing around doing things a few months at a time.

There is nothing wrong with young people or any other age person getting exposure in several different kinds of ministries. However, we should remember . . .

- The most effective ministry is when you go somewhere and stay.
- The most effective ministry is when you become a real expert at something.
- The most effective ministry is when you can train younger people out of a lifetime of doing something.

Vance Havner said, “We love to sing the song, “I will go where you want me to go but too many of us are not willing to say where he wants us to stay.”

When I look back over the ministry of our organization, IICS, those people who are the most effective are those who have gone there and stayed.

If you want to be successful in your ministry, be prepared to go somewhere and stay. Be prepared to commit your whole life to this project. And remember that even after you have committed your whole life to a project, the success may not come until after your ministry has ended. We are not going to complete all the ministries that are needed in the church in your lifetime.

Being reminded of these things should be a challenge to us. It also should enable us to relax just a bit. God’s whole kingdom is not dependent upon what I do in my lifetime.

God’s Work is not going to be Done Easily.

God’s work is going to take hard work.

There is nothing easy in this world. We who are Protestants do not believe that we are going to be justified by our work. However, we do believe that God’s kingdom is going to be built by our work. We are the creators of the “Protestant Work Ethic.” We believe that God is going to take our weak and imperfect efforts and multiply them like the loaves and the fish.

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God’s work here in Nigeria is going to be different from the way you did things where you came from.

- Building is different.
- Surgery is different
- Even preaching will be different.

And many of the ways that you do things are much more difficult and stressful than the way you did them before.

One of the things that I had to get accustomed to was the way we do exams in the university. We only give essay exams which makes marking them very tedious. We then put them on a grid and submit them to the department. The department goes through all of the marks and approves them. They results are then forwarded to the faculty. The faculty has to approve them. The results are then forward to the Senate and the Senate meets for at least a week approving results. To me it is the biggest waste of time possible. However, that is the way it is done.

However, God has called you to be here. And if God has called you to be here, he has called you to be here in the midst of these difficulties. Here is a good rule of thumb. ***You should change the things that you can reasonably change and accept the things over which you have no control.***

We have little or no control over the traffic. I used to get very frustrated with the traffic. I would sometimes believe that it is my job to teach all of the foolish drivers how to behave. However, the traffic is out of my control.

We can do a little about the lack of power in our houses. We can get long-life batteries for our laptops. We can get battery backup systems. There is no particular reason to do things “the old fashioned way” if we can figure out a better way and that better way will not interfere with your ministry. The point is that to do God’s work in Nigeria will require a lot of hard work.

God’s work is going to take overcoming difficulties.

We would like to think that since we are doing God’s work for him and since God is all powerful and since God loves us, he is going to make our work very easy. And, in some ways, that is the case. Jesus did say, “*Come unto me, all you who labor and are weary and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me for my yoke is easy and my burden is light.*” Here are two observations about that statement.

- There is still a yoke and a burden in the formula.
- Our yoke is easy and our burden is light in comparison to those who ignore God.

I was in Port Harcourt recently to attend an anniversary of a friend. He told about his attempts to get power using juju. The juju is a hard task master. He required him to produce 15,000 pounds sterling. When he took it to him, the juju priest threw the money in the fire.

I heard of another deputy governor who tried to hold his power through juju means. One juju required him to trek through the bush in the middle of the night, strip off all of his

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clothes and sit on an ant bed all night with the ants biting him. Those are hard task masters. Jesus is not going to treat us like that but we will still have burdens.

One of Job’s friends declared, *“Yet man is born to trouble as surely as sparks fly upward.”* Life is filled with difficulties and God’s ministry is certainly filled with difficulties. Therefore, we are going to experience many problems as we serve God.

- Serving God will take solving inter-personal conflicts.
- Serving God will take resolving misunderstandings.
- Serving God will take working through budget deficits.
- Serving God will take perseverance.

When troubles, come your way do not think that you are necessarily under the judgment of God. Remember these are the normal troubles of life.

God’s Work is not going to be done by angels.

God is not going to send angels to do our work. God is going to use human beings. For reasons that I do not fully understand, God has almost totally limited himself to working through human beings on this earth. This means that God wants to use you. You are one of God’s creations and He wants to use you to accomplish his purposes. This is an awesome thought—that God has created each of us to be his partners in work.

Sometimes we think about the littleness and unworthiness of humanity so much that we fail to remember that we are redeemed human beings, chosen by God to do his work. Don’t forget, you are one of God’s instruments and he is going to use you.

What does that mean?

- Human beings are weak. Therefore, we must learn to support one another.
- Human beings have different opinions about the best way of doing things. Therefore, we must learn to respect the opinions of others and work together.
- Human beings are at different levels of development and understanding. Therefore, we must be patient with one another.

If you are going to do God’s work, you are going to have to work with human beings. And it is an amazing thought that if God’s work is going to get done on this earth, it is going to get down through human beings. Even something as serious as the evangelism of the world—which involves the eternity of human beings—even that God has left into the hands of human beings. I read yesterday where Jesus made this amazing statement to his disciples, *“If you forgive anyone his sins, they are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven”* (John 20:23).

Remember we are God’s representatives on this earth. He expects us to do his will.

God’s Work is not going to be done alone.

When you review this drama of redemption, you will see that God used individuals but those individuals always worked with others.

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- Moses had Aaron.
- David had Nathan and many other advisors.
- Paul had Timothy

Because this is a hard, slow difficult work, it takes the willingness to work with others to give support and continuity to a project. One of the things that I fear for certain ministries is that they are not preparing for the next generation. In light of this, here are some observations:

- Make sure that you have partners with whom you are working.
- Make sure that you are mentoring someone to take your place.
- Make sure that you are working across denomination lines.
- Make sure that you are working with other missions agencies.

We are all part of God’s kingdom and we must all work together if we are going to see God’s kingdom built on this earth.

Conclusion

God sent Jesus to do a certain job. And Jesus is now sending us to do a job. I hope that we have some better idea about how we are going to go about doing that job.

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