

Who Do We Reach?

Welcome to **Week 2** of our new series we are calling **ON TARGET**. We are exploring the **MISSION** we have as followers of Jesus and what it is that we are supposed to be doing with the spiritual gifts God has given us. As we said last week, God does not give us spiritual gifts so that we can live our best life now or use them for our own benefit. He gives us spiritual gifts because He wants to use us to build His church. God wants to use our giftedness to reach people with the Gospel of HOPE. The idea that God sent His Son Jesus to live a sinless life, to die in our place, and be raised back to life from the dead so that sinners who turn from their sin and trust in Jesus will be forgiven and have eternal life. This is the **TARGET** of our mission and this is what we are to use our spiritual gifts to accomplish.

To help us engage with this concept we are to ASKING and ANSWERING FOUR QUESTIONS over the course of this series. Last week we dealt with the question of **WHY? "Why are we to make disciples?"** And as we looked at **Matthew 28:18-20** we determined that the answer to that question is because **"It's what followers of Jesus do."** We are to make disciples because Jesus our Lord commanded us to. We are to make disciples because it is through this process that we experience His intimate presence. We do this because we have a new identity and our identity is to be an **AMBASSADOR** for Jesus building bridges between God and those who do not know Him.

And so today, we arrive at that 2nd question to help us stay **ON TARGET** with our mission and that is the question of **WHO? "Who are we to reach"** with this message of HOPE? Before we jump in and explore this question further, let me pray for us that God would open our hearts to what His Spirit wants to say to us today. (PRAY)

Who are we to reach? Well, again the answer is fairly simple. **WE ARE TO REACH THE WORLD!** We find this in the passage we looked at last week.

Matthew 28:19 (NIV) Therefore go and make disciples of ALL NATIONS,..... In other words, wherever we find people these are people God wants to draw to Himself. The scope of our mission is to reach every tribe, nation and tongue with the glorious news of salvation. This theme runs throughout the Bible and has been God's desire from the beginning. It's found in God's promise to Abraham,

Genesis 12:1-3 (NIV) **1** The Lord had said to Abram, "Go from your country, your people and your father's household to the land I will show you. **2** "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. **3** I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you."

It's found in Jesus' prayer for His disciples and for all who would believe in Jesus because of their testimony just prior to His arrest and crucifixion on the cross.

John 17: 13-20 (NIV) 13 “I am coming to you now, but I say these things while I am still in the world, so that they may have the full measure of my joy within them. **14** I have given them your word and the world has hated them, for they are not of the world any more than I am of the world. **15** My prayer is not that you take them out of the world but that you protect them from the evil one. **16** They are not of the world, even as I am not of it. **17** Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth. **18** As you sent me into the world, I have sent them into the world. **19** For them I sanctify myself, that they too may be truly sanctified. **20** “My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message,

We see the fulfillment of our mission at the end of the age when God gives us a window into heaven and a picture of what will take place around the throne of God.

Revelation 7:9-10 (NIV) 9 After this I looked, and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and before the Lamb. They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands. **10** And they cried out in a loud voice, “Salvation belongs to our God, who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb.”

But where do we start? It's obvious that we can't do this by ourselves. Heck, we can't even do this alone as a church. The world is a big place and the task is too large to fulfill this mission on our own. So what's MY target? **What's YOUR target?** Well to answer that question we need to first look to God's word to establish some parameters for our target.

Acts 1:3-8 (NIV) 3 After his suffering, he presented himself to them and gave many convincing proofs that he was alive. He appeared to them over a period of forty days and spoke about the kingdom of God. **4** On one occasion, while he was eating with them, he gave them this command: “Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised, which you have heard me speak about. **5** For John baptized with water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.” **6** Then they gathered around him and asked him, “Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?” We tend to always be thinking about ourselves. For them it was, when are you going to restore Israel? For some of us, its Lord, when are you delivering us from this sinful world? Or, Lord, when are you going to make America Christian again. **7** He said to them: “It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority. **8** But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses and notice what He says regarding where they are to be witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”

Notice the progression of their witness target. **They are to start where they are and branch out from there keeping before them the tension of their overall mission which is ultimately the world.** Jesus didn't call them to a new area until where they were currently was ready to be left. Now, let's bring this into focus. What was their Jerusalem? It was where they lived. Their community where they lived, worked, and played. What was Judea and Samaria? It was the surrounding area around their community. This included some places they liked to visit and would go to from time to time and some areas where they did not care much for at all.

(Emphasize racial tensions and prejudice between Jews and Samaritans) But notice the last realm. The ends of the earth. These parameters must be our concern as well.

So where do we start and what is to be our TARGET? The answer, **we start with our physical sphere of influence and we keep our heart open to how God may want to use us in the world at large to engage people with the Gospel.**

Our sphere of influence is the lives of the people you touch on a daily basis. Our greatest impact will be with the people we have relationships with that you invest in daily. One of our core values here at VC is **“Relationships make the difference.”** You will make your greatest impact through the relationships you form and build. The first place we should look to carry out our mission is with those people God has already placed around us! This is our Jerusalem. These are the people you have the opportunity to care for and show love to daily. Family / Friends / Neighbors / Coworkers / People you engage with through extra curricular activities, these are all social circles that give you relationship connections. This is the beginning of your mission field! This is your Jerusalem as it was for the disciples. Notice how the Gospel message began and how it started to expand.

John 1:35-46 (NIV) 35 The next day John was there again with two of his disciples. **36** When he saw Jesus passing by, he said, “Look, the Lamb of God!”

37 When the two disciples heard him say this, they followed Jesus. **38** Turning around, Jesus saw them following and asked, “What do you want?”

They said, “Rabbi” (which means “Teacher”), “where are you staying?”

39 “Come,” he replied, “and you will see.”

So they went and saw where he was staying, and they spent that day with him. It was about four in the afternoon.

40 Andrew, Simon Peter’s brother, was one of the two who heard what John had said and who had followed Jesus. **41** The first thing Andrew did was to find his brother Simon and tell him, “We have found the Messiah” (that is, the Christ). **42** And he brought him to Jesus.

Jesus looked at him and said, “You are Simon son of John. You will be called Cephas” (which, when translated, is Peter)

43 The next day Jesus decided to leave for Galilee. Finding Philip, he said to him, “Follow me.”

44 Philip, like Andrew and Peter, was from the town of Bethsaida. **45** Philip found Nathanael and told him, “We have found the one Moses wrote about in the Law, and about whom the prophets also wrote—Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph.”

46 “Nazareth! Can anything good come from there?” Nathanael asked.

“Come and see,” said Philip.

I want you to notice that the disciples simply leveraged their relationships to introduce family and friends to Jesus. But after that, it was on Jesus to take it from there. You say, “but I don’t have the physical presence of Jesus to introduce them to. If I did, I could do what they did.” But I would say to you, “you do have the presence of Jesus. He lives in you if you are a believer, through the Holy Spirit.” The question is, do people see Jesus in you? (Referring to the fruit of the spirit). You also have the Word of God and the Bible tells us that Jesus is the WORD made flesh. If you introduce someone to the word of God in essence you are introducing them to Jesus.

But your Jerusalem is not the only place you can build relationships. It is where you spend most of your time and where most of your intimate relationships are formed but you do go to other places and you do have the opportunity to engage with others who are outside of your social circle. Especially if you are open to God’s leading and willing to do so. Here is one such example when God called Philip to go south toward Gaza.

Acts 8:26-40 (NIV) 26 Now an angel of the Lord said to Philip, “Go south to the road—the desert road—that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza.” **27** So he started out, and on his way he met an Ethiopian[a] eunuch, an important official in charge of all the treasury of the Kandake (which means “queen of the Ethiopians”). This man had gone to Jerusalem to worship, **28** and on his way home was sitting in his chariot reading the Book of Isaiah the prophet. **29** The Spirit told Philip, “Go to that chariot and stay near it.” **30** Then Philip ran up to the chariot and heard the man reading Isaiah the prophet. Are we running to Gospel opportunities or are we hesitantly walking? “Do you understand what you are reading?” Philip asked. **31** “How can I,” he said, “unless someone explains it to me?” So he invited Philip to come up and sit with him. **32** This is the passage of Scripture the eunuch was reading: “He was led like a sheep to the slaughter, and as a lamb before its shearer is silent, so he did not open his mouth. **33** In his humiliation he was deprived of justice. Who can speak of his descendants? For his life was taken from the earth.” **34** The eunuch asked Philip, “Tell me, please, who is the prophet talking about, himself or someone else?” **35** Then Philip began with that very passage of Scripture and told him the good news about Jesus. Are you familiar enough with the word of God that you are able to walk people through scripture and explain the truths of God, especially the gospel of Jesus?

The Ethiopian was seeking after God and the Lord through the Spirit led Philip to engage with the Ethiopian who by the way was a foreigner and whom Philip did not know until that day. You never know when God may put someone in your path or call you to go somewhere for the very purpose of engaging a stranger with a conversation about God. We must be open and willing to go and share when it presents itself. But notice Philip’s encounter didn’t happen in Jerusalem. You see God is moving all around us and in various places. Let’s not get tunnel vision when it comes to our mission field and let’s be open to other places where God made lead us.

Sometimes God really stretches us and the place he wants us to go is the last place we would ever even consider. The Jews had a great dislike for the Romans for obvious reasons but also

due to the fact that they were considered pagan Gentile dogs in the eyes of the Jews. One of Peter's great struggles was overcoming his prejudice towards non-Jews. Even though Peter struggled with Romans, especially Roman soldiers, God is going to send him to the house of a Roman Centurion to share the Gospel. Before he is sent Peter is given a vision where God highlights and confronts his prejudice. **Acts 10:19-33(NIV) 19** While Peter was still thinking about the vision, the Spirit said to him, "Simon, three men are looking for you. **20** So get up and go downstairs. Do not hesitate to go with them, for I have sent them." **21** Peter went down and said to the men, "I'm the one you're looking for. Why have you come?" **22** The men replied, "We have come from Cornelius the centurion. He is a righteous and God-fearing man, who is respected by all the Jewish people. A holy angel told him to ask you to come to his house so that he could hear what you have to say." **23** Then Peter invited the men into the house to be his guests. A Jew would never invite a Gentile into their house nor would they themselves consider entering the house of a Gentile because they believed it would defile them making them unclean before God. They looked down on Gentiles as being less than human. **The next day Peter started out with them, and some of the believers from Joppa went along. 24** The following day he arrived in Caesarea. Cornelius was expecting them and had called together his relatives and close friends. **25** As Peter entered the house, Cornelius met him and fell at his feet in reverence. **26** But Peter made him get up. "Stand up," he said, "I am only a man myself." **27** While talking with him, Peter went inside and found a large gathering of people. **28** He said to them: "You are well aware that it is against our law for a Jew to associate with or visit a Gentile. It was frowned upon for even a Jew to have any association at all with a Gentile. **But God has shown me that I should not call anyone impure or unclean.** Btw, we all are impure and unclean because of sin, not because of our skin color, social circle, or nationality. **29** So when I was sent for, I came without raising any objection. May I ask why you sent for me?" **30** Cornelius answered: "Three days ago I was in my house praying at this hour, at three in the afternoon. Suddenly a man in shining clothes stood before me **31** and said, 'Cornelius, God has heard your prayer and remembered your gifts to the poor. **32** Send to Joppa for Simon who is called Peter. He is a guest in the home of Simon the tanner, who lives by the sea.' **33** So I sent for you immediately, and it was good of you to come. Now we are all here in the presence of God to listen to everything the Lord has commanded you to tell us." The beautiful thing is that God is already at work in people's lives before we get there. The pressure isn't on our shoulders. It's on God's shoulders and we are to play our part.

Our mission is not just to our Jerusalem although that is where we start. It is also to every place we have an opportunity to go and it should also include those that may even kick against our own prejudices. The point is, are you open to the opportunities that God has placed before you? Opportunities to share Jesus with those who do not know Him whether they happen to be in our Jerusalem or in other parts of the world..

So what do we do with this? Let me give you 5 practical steps to consider as you open yourself up to what God may want to do in and through your witness.

- 1) I want to challenge you to Identify who in your sphere of influence needs Jesus? (When you came in you received a sphere of influence map. Use this to begin listing your

relational connections in your sphere of influence. Start with Family, Friends, Coworkers etc.

2) Pray for God to open their hearts to His Gospel and for opportunities to share with them as you seek to build and grow your relationship with them. Prayer is one of the most important things we can do in this process because it is God who draws people to Him.

3) Look for opportunities to have spiritual conversations and be quick to listen to their fears, anxieties and struggles before engaging them with Jesus. Will you allow God to use you to engage people in spiritual conversations? And are you looking for these opportunities intentionally?

4) Begin to view all of life as a mission field and ask God to help you see all people you engage along the way as He sees them. Don't just see people but see eternal souls that will never die. See people that Jesus loves so much that He died for them. See people who desperately, whether they realize it or not, need Jesus!!

5) Be open, ready and listening to the Holy Spirit for HOW He may want to use you and to WHERE He may want to send you. Are you willing? Are you listening? And are you preparing for what He may call you to do?

As you take these steps let me give you a couple of warnings:

- Genuinely care about people and what they are dealing with in life, don't just strive to share Jesus or get them to make a decision for Christ.

John 13:35 (NIV) By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another. See 1 Corinth 13 for definition of love. Empathize with them. Show them that you care. Love on them as God gives you opportunity. Don't condemn them and don't pass judgment on them. The devil is doing enough of that. They need to know that no matter what God loves them and wants to cancel their sin debt forever.

- Don't let difficult people harden your heart. **Hurt people, hurt people!** Maybe all they need is to know someone cares. Love your enemy, Bless those who curse you, Do good to those who persecute you and spitefully use you. (Matt. 5:44)

Let's go and be a witness in our Jerusalem, Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.

Next week we will answer the Question: What do we say? (Let's Pray)

Worship Comes Back Up

Invitation:

1) Write Five names on your sphere of influence map and then we are going to pray over them

2) If you are unsure how to share the Gospel would you sign up today?

Bladen - following church today (lunch is provided) will you make plans to stay?

Pembroke - Next Sunday after church? March 26th

Lumberton - April 2nd

3) Would you consider participating in the Prayer Walk Next **Saturday March 25th 10 to 12** as we pray for God to draw our city to Him?