

THE LAW OF MISSION: WORSHIP AND THE MISSION OF GOD

BY WILL MANCINI AND CORY HARTMAN

The Law of Mission has to come before everything else for us because it came before everything else for God. God had a mission before there **was** anything else. God's mission is to the universe what the ignition system is to a car: it is the spark that starts the whole system running. The mission of God even comes before the worship of God, because God existed when there was nothing else to worship him. In fact, his mission was to change that.

It is critical to note, however, that even though God was alone, God was not solitary. The Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit—one God in three persons—were all together. So from eternity past, God's mission was not an "I" mission but a "we" mission. From before anything else was made, mission came from a family. In fact, God's mission was to grow his family—a family made for worship.

God's mission was—and is—to make persons and things and systems that would receive his glory and goodness and reflect it back as a polished mirror reflects blazing light. Unlike most of creation, angels and humans are privileged to know that this exchange is happening and to join in it joyously of our own accord as members of his family. Through the Son we perceive the Father, are awed by him, praise him, mimic him, serve him. We thrive on his glory and goodness as a tree thrives on sunshine and rain. This is worship.

Before anything could worship God, however, he had to create it first. God had to create the morning stars before they could sing together and the angels before they could shout for joy (Job 38:7). God had to create all nature—animals on land, sea, and air, trees, mountains, oceans, celestial bodies, even the weather—before it could praise him (Ps. 148:3–10). God had to create human beings before they could say to him, "LORD, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth!" (Ps. 8).

So God had to have a mission to make worshipers before there could be worship. At the present time, however, his mission is not finished because his creation is not perfect or complete. Sadly, it is polluted by the rebellion and corruption of angels and humans—sin and its consequences. We do not reflect his glory and goodness the way we were made to, and we and the whole earth suffer for it. The worshiping family is fractured and its members are

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alienated. So God embarked on a new phase to his mission: a mission to re-create nature and a mission to redeem us back into his family to participate in it again.

As we listen to the Bible, we hear the same pattern over and over like the refrain of a beautiful song we never want to end. Time and again, **God initiates his mission, involves his people together in it, and receives their worship in response:**

- God appeared to **Abram** with a promise to bless and a command to go, and it turned Abram's family from worshiping idols to the living God.
- God appeared to **Moses** and all the family of Israel with the same promise and the same command, and it turned Israel's worship from the gods of Egypt to the God of their fathers.
- God chose **David** to be anointed with oil and with his Spirit to defend his people and his name, and that turned Israel from worshiping Canaanite deities to worshiping Yahweh in Jerusalem.
- God empowered **Cyrus** of Persia to rule the world and to resource the Jews' return to their land to rebuild a temple where their God would be worshiped.
- God anointed **his Son** to heal his people, and as a result they glorified God in amazement.
- God directed **his Son** to die to redeem and sanctify a people for his possession and praise.

God's mission for us comes before our worship of him both logically and chronologically. "This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins" (1 John 4:10).

However, if we do not pay close attention, we will clumsily miss our steps when God calls us to join him on the dance floor. It is an easy mistake to conclude that God does his mission part, then we do our worship part. But when we look again at the pattern of Scripture, we see that human beings stand on both sides of the mission-worship equation. When God initiates something new on his mission of redemption, he always recruits human partners to serve him in it, to join his missional family. **Worship does not happen merely because God is on a mission; worship happens because a human being obediently partners with God in his mission.** So even at the human level, mission takes priority before worship. As thinkers of the missional reorientation declared, a worship service is a weekly activity that flows out of a family-on-mission identity.

Look again at the Great Commission of Matthew 28:16–20. For twenty-seven chapters and sixteen verses of the Gospel, Jesus is a human being partnering with God in his mission. As a result, in 28:17 his eleven disciples worship him (since he is God also).

Then Jesus issues the Great Commission. What is he doing? He is ordering his disciples to **continue the mission** themselves. A few years ago I (Will) enjoyed dinner with Robert Coleman, the author of **The Master Plan of Evangelism**. I asked Dr. Coleman to boil down the essence of the book that had so powerfully shaped my life. In the process he mentioned that perhaps the most underappreciated reality at the moment the disciples received the Great Commission was that it wasn't a surprise. It wasn't new information. It was the reminder—with crystal clarity—to continue precisely what they had been experiencing in their years with Jesus.

Now let's take it a step further. If the disciples executed the mission, "all nations" would learn to obey Jesus as their Master—in other words, they would worship Jesus too. But obeying "everything" Jesus commands also means obeying the Great Commission, so they would go make disciples as well. Then **those people** would worship, and then **they** would get on board the mission to still others.

This is the beautiful spiral. God is on a mission to redeem a people for his own possession (Ex. 19:15; 1 Pet. 2:9; Rev. 21:3). He invites a person to join him and his family in the mission. As a result, people who are redeemed as a result of the mission start worshipping. Then they join in the mission themselves, and the dance goes on.

