

On Mission during Quarantine and Beyond **Acts 1:1-11**

Mission: Impossible is a series of American action spy films. The main character is Ethan Hunt, an agent of the **Impossible Missions Force (IMF)**.

Mission Impossible—“Your mission, _____, should you choose to accept it, ... This tape will **self-destruct** in five seconds.”

“Finding Christ in the Corona Crisis” theme. One way we will find Christ in these days is to help others find Christ for themselves. Today I want to talk with you about our Mission as followers of Christ, particularly during the Coronavirus days but also beyond. Not a mission of IMF but from God for ICF and every church. We are agents, called disciples or witnesses.

- **A disciple is a learning, loyal, loving, lifelong follower of Jesus.**

If you are a follower of Jesus, you are also called to be a witness for Christ.

- **A witness is someone who tells what they know to be true and what they have experienced.**

Today, we will talk about what it means to be on mission with God during these days. God has given us a mission. I pray we will choose to accept it.

ICF's Mission--

Matthew 28:18-20—Jesus said,¹⁸ “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.¹⁹ Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,²⁰ and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”

Covid-19 has forced us into a new world—physical distancing, for some loss of jobs, working at home, more time with family, kids at home full-time (poor kids!), wearing funny looking masks when out, no travel, staycations, economic uncertainty, health risks, political maneuvering (in some countries), explosion of internet platforms like Zoom. Our lives will probably never be quite the same.

Our mission has not changed, and it won't change when things are back to some kind of “normal.” Christ's mission is our mission. If we will open our eyes we can see that every day God is giving us opportunities to be on mission with Him.

Hear the Word of the Lord

¹ In my former book, *Theophilus*, I wrote about all that Jesus began to do and to teach ² until the day he was taken up to heaven, after giving instructions through the Holy Spirit to the apostles he had chosen. 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?"

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 in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."

⁹ After he said this, he was taken up before their very eyes, and a cloud hid him from their sight.

¹⁰ They were looking intently up into the sky as he was going, when suddenly two men dressed in white stood beside them. ¹¹ "Men of Galilee," they said, "why do you stand here looking into the sky? This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven."

1. Christ's mission, our mission, is a CONTINUING mission (1-2a).

1 In my former book, Theophilus, I wrote about all that Jesus began to do and to teach ² until the day he was taken up to heaven, after giving instructions through the Holy Spirit to the apostles he had chosen.

Luke, a Christian Gentile physician and a companion to the apostle Paul on many occasions, picks up a pen to write to Theophilus, whose name means, "loved by God" or "lover of God." Theophilus was probably a Greek Christian. We know nothing else about him. Luke reminds him of the previous book (Gospel of Luke) he wrote to him to tell about what Jesus **began** to do and teach up until the time he returned to heaven (the ascension, *Himmelfahrt*).

Jesus' mission was one of hope and help, preaching good news to the poor, freedom to the prisoners, sight for the blind, release for the oppressed, and a time of God's favor. He lived out this mission in his words and actions.

What **began** in Luke's Gospel **continues** in the book of Acts. It was an all-encompassing mission of bringing God's kingdom, His rule in the world to one person at a time. Every kingdom needs a king, subjects, and a territory. In the Kingdom of God, Christ is King. His disciples are willing subjects. His territory is the hearts of men and women. His message is the Good News, the Gospel.

The ascension (Himmelfahrt) marks the end of Jesus' story as a man on earth —“*until the day he was taken up into heaven.*” In the Book of Acts, the ascension marks the beginning of the story of the church, our story.

The book of Acts traces the history of the first century believers as they were on mission. If you read the entire book you will find that it ends in Rome where the Apostle Paul is in prison. The closing words:

Acts 28:30-31--For two whole years Paul stayed there in his own rented house and welcomed all who came to see him. Boldly and without hindrance he preached the kingdom of God and taught about the Lord Jesus Christ.

The kingdom of God is the message about Jesus Christ. Although Paul is in shackles and in prison, the Gospel is ***unhindered***. Barriers are not hindrances but hurdles. The Gospel moves ahead. The Mission continues. In many ways, we are today writing the next chapter of Acts. The mission is now given to us.

The same Spirit who empowered Jesus in his earthly ministry and that empowered the early church also empowers us. Jesus still preaches and ministers and cares and heals and delivers... through us. Christ's mission, our mission, is a continuing mission for us—all of us.

2. Christ's mission, our mission, is ours because the HOLY SPIRIT LIVES IN US (3-5).

³After 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. ⁴On 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. ⁵For John baptized with water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.”

For 40 days after his resurrection Jesus instructed his disciples and solidified the truth that he was indeed alive. He provided them evidence numerous times—to two disciples on the road to Emmaus, to Mary, to Peter and John, to the group of frightened disciples hiding in an upper room in Jerusalem, to Peter and others who were fishing on the Sea of Galilee, and other times. It was these “convincing proofs” that solidified their witness that, “Jesus was alive!” Jesus prepared them for their mission. What did he speak about? The kingdom of God, God's rule in the hearts of people. The early church's message was that responding to the Gospel, the Good News about Christ, brings a person into the Kingdom of God.

On one occasion, as Jesus met with his disciples, he told them to wait in Jerusalem for the gift that the Father had promised, the Holy Spirit. Until this time, we read of the Holy Spirit coming upon Jesus at His baptism, filling Him to preach and teach and work miracles, leading Him into and out of the wilderness where He was tempted, and at other times. But NOW, the Holy Spirit is going to come upon ALL of Jesus' followers and be IN all of them. Chapter 2 tells the story of how the Holy Spirit was poured out on the early disciples on the day of Pentecost in a visible form like fire. They were ALL filled. And they ALL gave witness to the wonders of God.

The same Holy Spirit *is WITH US and IN US*. Christ's mission, our mission, is ours because the Holy Spirit lives in us too.

3. Christ's mission, our mission, is possible because THE HOLY SPIRIT EMPOWERS US TO TELL OTHERS ABOUT JESUS (6-8).

6 Then they gathered around him and asked him, "Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?"

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 in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."

The disciples were thrilled about the kingdom of God. But they were mistaken about when it would happen. They thought Jesus was going to bring the Kingdom in its fullness immediately. Jesus replaces their speculation by telling them their task in the interim period. He does not deny their hope of his coming but he tells them that their task was world missions, bringing the Gospel "to the ends of the earth."

Acts 1:8 is the theme verse of the Book of Acts. It tells how the Gospel would spread. In chapters 1-7 the Gospel comes to Jerusalem. In chapters 8-12, it reaches all Judea and Samaria. In chapters 13-28, it spreads to the ends of the earth. JESUS' story led TO Jerusalem. The CHURCH'S story leads FROM Jerusalem.

Jesus tells his followers, "You will BE my witnesses." A witness is someone who has experienced something. Someday in the future we will all tell our children and grandchildren, "I was there in Germany during the Coronavirus days. This is what it was like." We are witnesses of it. Likewise, if you have personally come to know Christ, you are a witness. Our very lives reflect the fact that we know Him. We too know something about the wonders of God.

Because we ARE witnesses, we are called to share with others what we know, to tell our story. In a discipleship triad I am in with two other ICF men, we have been discussing what it means to witness to others and some of the things that keep us from doing what we know we should. One thing is a fear that comes from thinking that witnessing is “offending people for Jesus’ sake,” “trying to force someone to listen to our speech about Jesus.”

But a better way of seeing witnessing is, “one beggar telling another beggar where to find bread.” It is sharing with our friends about how Jesus has made a difference in our lives. What he has done for us. We cannot save our friends; it is the Holy Spirit who draws them to God. Jesus promises that we will be empowered by the Holy Spirit to BE witnesses and GIVE a witness. The presence and power of the Holy Spirit was the “secret sauce” that enabled the early believers to give a powerful witness. The Holy Spirit in us enables us to carry out the mission of Christ in the world today.

One of the most powerful ways to witness to someone is simply to tell your story, to tell how Christ has brought life to you:

- **Telling your story--**
 - 1. My life before coming to Christ.**
 - 2. How I committed my life to Christ.**
 - 3. How my life is different now that Christ is in it.**

Our message is the Good News about Jesus. He is the subject of our witness. It is not about us. It is about him. And when we talk to our friends about Jesus, the Holy Spirit will empower us. There are two promises: you will receive power and you will be my witnesses.

- 4. Christ’s mission, our mission, is our privilege and responsibility until Jesus returns (9-11).**

⁹After he said this, he was taken up before their very eyes, and a cloud hid him from their sight.

¹⁰They were looking intently up into the sky as he was going, when suddenly two men dressed in white stood beside them. ¹¹“Men of Galilee,” they said, “why do you stand here looking into the sky? This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven.”

As Jesus went up into heaven in a cloud, the disciples' eyes were fixed on the cloud in the sky. They were staring, gazing. That is understandable. We would have been also, no doubt.

But two angels, messengers from heaven, appear and give a necessary rebuke. Now is not the time to stare. Now is the time to witness to what you have seen. And a promise—Jesus will return. Just as surely as you saw him go, he will return.

This is our hope, our assurance. Jesus will return. When? It is not for us to know (v. 7). Meanwhile we are not to be “standing here looking into the sky” but preparing for his return. Now is the time to witness to what we know and have experienced.

I want to share a practical tool for witnessing. Sometimes we don't share with our friends because we don't know what to say.

- **“The Bridge to LIFE.”**

It provides a tool to help a person cross from where they are to where God wants them to be. Google it. One verse of Scripture—Romans 6:23. You could even write it on a napkin, and draw it while you talk.

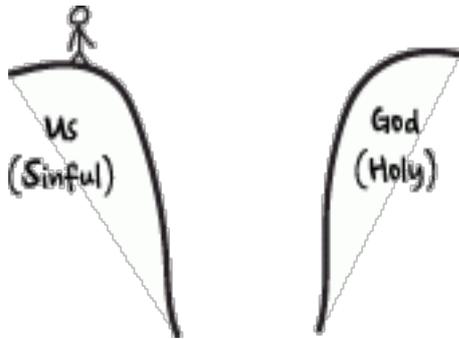
Romans 6:23—“For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

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The Bible starts with God creating the universe. The crown of His creation was mankind, made in the image of God. Genesis begins with a beautiful, bountiful universe, with God and mankind living in perfect harmony. This was life as God intended it. But shortly after the beginning of the story, rebellion strikes. And with it, death and separation from God. People decide to listen to a voice that led them away from God. You know the story.

Romans 6:23—“For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.”



Rather than walking in a loving relationship with the Creator, the first couple and every person since then has known the feeling of separation from God. What is the problem. In a word, SIN. We think, say, and do things that do not honor God but dishonor him. God is holy. We are not. And our verse tells us, “the wages of sin is death.” A wage is something you earn. As sinners we have earned something—Death. And this is not just physical death but eternal separation from God. We try to get back to God by doing good deeds, being moral people, trying to keep the 10 commandments, even joining a church or being baptized. But we still have the problem—sin. And sin separates us from God.

Romans 6:23—“For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

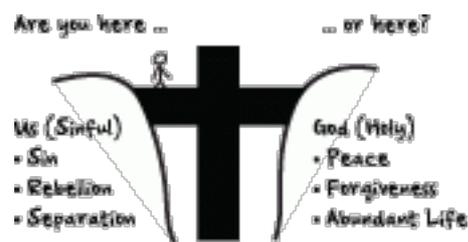


BUT

Notice, however, the word, BUT. An important word here. This is not the end of the story. BUT is followed by, “the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.” God knows we are not holy and righteous. He knew that, because of our sin, we are separated from Him. So he did for us what we could do for ourselves. He sent his Son, Jesus, to live and then to die-- for us. Jesus was like us in many ways but in one way he was unique—He never sinned. Yet He died. The Bible says He died not because of His sins but to pay the penalty for our sins. He became the bridge to God, to LIFE. The verse says, “The gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.” Jesus is the bridge to God and to eternal life—that is abundant life now and everlasting life with God into eternity. No more separation but a personal relationship with our Creator. It is a gift. But a gift must be received to be ours. How do we receive God’s gift of eternal life? By believing God’s story about ourselves and the truth about his Son, Jesus. And by

trusting that what he did was enough to bring us to God. The gift is **in** Christ Jesus our Lord. The title “Christ” means one who is appointed and anointed for a task. The name Jesus means, “God saves.” And the word, Lord, means, “Master, Ruler.” We believe in Jesus by giving Him, our Savior, control of our lives. We believe and we receive God’s gift. Then we begin a life of fellowship with God, following him as his disciple and as a witness of the life he gives.

Romans 6:23—“For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.”



BUT

What a story—The One who created us also sent his Son to save us. Although we were separated from God because of our sin, he built a bridge back to himself and to the life that only he can give. The question is, where are you? Which side of the bridge are you today? Would you like to walk across the bridge that God has built for you into his arms of love and life? You must choose!

Applications for living on mission:

God is calling us to mission today. OUR mission, if we choose to accept it, is to be his witnesses and to follow Christ as his disciples. YOUR mission, if you choose to accept it, is to be his witness and to follow Christ as his disciple. Today. And tomorrow.

1. Have you chosen to cross the bridge from death to eternal life? If not, will you choose to do it today?

2. Will you choose today to ask, “Lord, what are you doing today around me? I will watch to see what you are doing and join you in your mission.”

3. Will you surrender to the Holy Spirit’s prompting? “Lord, fill me so that I can have the courage, compassion, and power to be your witness.”

