FBS “Missions 401: To the End of the Earth—Mission (Almost) Accomplished” 4-2-17

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**Intro.** Every language known to man has its fair share of idioms & phrases which may not always translate well into other languages but are common enough to know in a particular language. We have phrases like “walking in high cotton” or “up a creek without a paddle” or a person’s “elevator doesn’t go to the top floor.” These sayings make sense to most Americans, but additional explanation is necessary for other cultures. The phrase “Mission Accomplished” is one we are familiar with, but just because someone claims a mission has been accomplished doesn’t mean it is. Former President George W. Bush received a great deal of criticism for saying the mission in Iraq was accomplished in May 2003 when the war continued to be fought for another 9 years. As we conclude our series in Acts 15-28 today on “Missions 401: To the End of the Earth,” we look at Acts 28 & “Mission (Almost) Accomplished.”

Theme: Mission

Background: As Paul wrote the Christians in Rome, his desire was to get there to use Rome as a base for a mission to Spain (Romans 15:24), because Spain was among the “ends of the earth” in that day & Paul wanted to do everything he could to fulfill Jesus’ mission of taking the gospel of Jesus Christ to Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria & the ends of the earth. Paul made it to Rome in Acts 28.

* When Paul finally got to Rome, it’s as though Luke records it as a fulfillment of Acts 1:8 that the mission had been accomplished. Even Paul believed Jesus could return in his lifetime as though the mission was accomplished—“we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord” (1 Thessalonians 4:17).
* Yet we know it’s been nearly 2,000 years since Jesus ascended to the Father & the gospel has spread to the 4 corners of the world & the mission is accomplished more today than it was then. But we dare not say “Mission Accomplished,” because only the Lord can say that when He returns. But we can think of it as “Mission (Almost) Accomplished” & work faithfully until it is so.
* What steps can we take to advance the mission of spreading Jesus Christ so that the Lord says “Mission Accomplished?”

**1. Keep the kingdom of God & kingship of Jesus central in your witness (28:20, 23, 31)**

* If you just talk about “God” without mentioning Jesus, lots of world religions may agree with you—do you believe in God? Do you love God? Etc.—we must be specific about God & His Son Jesus Christ
* Jesus is the hope of Israel (28:20), because His resurrection from the dead proves He is the Messiah, the King of God’s kingdom

Illus: Keeping the kingdom of God & the message of Jesus central is crucial because Jesus will build His kingdom whether He builds every local church or not—if I witness to someone & invite them to my church & they tell me they weren’t comfortable or it wasn’t a good fit for them, I recommend other churches to them, because the kingdom of God is far more important than FBS, but I also want our church to grow (but not at any cost)

**2. Share the gospel faithfully but leave the miracle of salvation to God (28:24-28)**

* Paul referenced Isaiah who spoke of the Jews having blind eyes, hard hearts & deaf ears as the reason why they would reject the gospel
* When you share the gospel, some people will believe & get saved. Those who don’t believe & reject the message is simply consistent with their blind eyes, hard hearts & deaf ears
* But when lost people believe, it’s because God did a miracle in their lives—they were once lost, but now found; they were once blind, but now they see; they were once dead in their trespasses & sins but now they are alive in Christ!

Illus: People who don’t have a working heart or eye or ear may get a heart transplant, eye cornea transplant, ear cochlear transplant, etc.—that’s what God does spiritually for people who repent & believe—God does a miracle in salvation!

**3. Don’t let your challenging circumstances keep you from serving the Lord (28:30-31; cf. chap 21-28)**

* Paul spent nearly 5 years at the end of the Acts account as a prisoner—2 years in Caesarea Maritima, 6 months traveling by ship & 2 years under house arrest in Rome. Yet during this time, Paul wrote the Prison Epistles & witnessed to Jews & Gentiles & high officials, including Nero! (cf. 27:24)

Illus: Jesus served God the Father no matter how many people rejected Him & no matter how much suffering He faced. The prophets served the Lord even when kings sought their lives (Elijah, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Daniel). The apostles served the Lord Jesus until they died, though they suffered for their faith (James, Peter, Paul, John)—you, too, can keep serving the Lord no matter what you are facing. It may shift from what you did at one time, but you can pray or encourage or give to advance the mission of spreading Jesus Christ

**What does mission have to do with our church’s vision?**

* Our **mission statement** is common to all Christians, based on the Great Commandments & the Great Commission—**Love Jesus. Love Others. Lead Others to Love Jesus.**
* Our **vision statement** uses that concept, but applies it to our particular setting, based on Jesus’ words in John 8:37-38—**Thirsty? Come** (to Jesus). **Drink** (from Jesus). ***Live*** (for Jesus)**!**
* But what does that look like? Let me give you some ways. It means building good relationships with our neighbors by having a presence in the local schools (where we are allowed) & having a good rapport with local business owners & groups. We should keep providing clothes & food & financial assistance to those in need. We should look for ways to give people a positive experience on our campus (not just Sunday mornings). If we need to offer ESL or GriefShare or DivorceCare or offer classes on basic carpentry skills or basic cooking skills or whatever to connect with our neighbors, we should be willing to do so. We want to be their friends as a way we love others, so that the Lord may give us opportunities to lead others to love Jesus.
* I still believe the day will come we have a gymnasium to help meet the needs of an exercise-crazed culture with youth & adult sports (basketball, cheerleading, indoor soccer, gymnastics, volleyball, running, weightlifting, etc.)—to build relationships so we can talk about Jesus.
* I believe we need to offer a contemporary service in addition to what we’re doing now to reach a segment that has slipped through our fingers. Many have left or checked us one time only to look for a contemporary praise band. We can do that in the coming months on the South Campus after we get video equipment purchased & installed & get feedback from the church family as to who would be interested in supporting it
* I believe the day will come when we branch out & offer a multi-site church through an umbrella of Sweetwater that can sustain a new campus for a few years until they are ready to become self-sustaining congregations. Plenty of other churches have done it. Why can’t we look for places where there is little gospel presence?
* All of these things & more are ways to find people who are Thirsty, so we can invite them to **Come** to Jesus. Once they come to Him, they can **Drink** from Him deeply & always find their thirst quenched in Him. They can ***Live*** for Jesus

**Conc.** Walk with me to Jerusalem almost 2,000 years ago. See a Man gathered in an upper room with his 12 closest friends, eating a meal together. They would leave & walk toward a garden, something like a public park today. They sing a song together, but mostly the mood turns somber as the Leader talks about going away. A little later & we see this Man praying in the garden & He’s in extreme agony, so much that He is sweating as it were great drops of blood. He is wrestling with God about His mission to come & offer Himself on behalf of the sins of the world. A few moments later & He is arrested. Throughout the night & the early hours of the next morning, the Man is quickly tried & convicted of crucifixion. After He is beaten, they soldiers nailed Him to a cross where He suffered for 6 hours before giving up His life & crying “It is finished!” When Jesus died on the cross, His mission of salvation was accomplished. But the mission of spreading the message of salvation was just beginning. Paul accomplished a great deal in his lifetime, as did the other apostles. Servants like Ignatius, Irenaeus, Athanasius, Augustine, Luther, Zwingli, Calvin, Edwards, Carey, Fuller, Livingstone, Taylor, Graham & more have helped accomplish the mission. And that baton has been passed to us—will we build relationships & share the hope of Jesus with those around us? The Mission is almost accomplished, but not yet. Will you be another to trust Him today? Once the Lord announces “Mission Accomplished,” no one else will get in.