

Xenos Christian Fellowship
Christian Ministry 3: Moving Into a Ministry Lifestyle
Week 1: A Lifestyle of Self-Giving Love – The Big Picture

Introduction

The purpose of this unit is to introduce you to a life of Christian ministry. “Ministry” means service, and the Christian life is to be a life of service to God and others. But before we begin to describe this way of life, we need to understand the main biblical dynamic that undergirds and motivates it.

The core dynamic is love. We are to pursue lives of radical love motivated by God’s radical love for us. We are to live a lifestyle that revolves around receiving God’s love for us and giving his love away to others. To the extent that you embrace this core dynamic, you will live a fruitful and fulfilling Christian life; to the extent that you don’t do this, you will live a sub-Christian life.

Many, many New Testament passages teach this way of life.¹ Let’s look at Jn. 13, where Jesus made this the final lesson that he modeled for his disciples.

THE SETTING (13:1,2): Jesus knew that the time had come for him to be betrayed and arrested and unjustly condemned and beaten and crucified. He was having his last meal with his disciples, and Jewish tradition dictated that a household slave should wash the feet of the guest rabbi. If there was no household slave, tradition dictated that the least of his disciples should perform this task. But Luke tells us that Jesus’ disciples were all trying to avoid this task, so they began to argue which of them was the greatest.

JESUS’ “KNOWLEDGE” (13:3): We will come back to this later . . .

JESUS’ SERVICE (13:4,5): Jesus assumed the role of the household slave and washed his disciples’ feet. And when he got done, their feet were clean and all their filth was now on him.

JESUS’ CALL (13:12-16): Now that he had gotten their attention, Jesus made sure they understood the lesson he was teaching them. Jesus is our Lord and Teacher, and at the heart of following him is the *call* to a lifestyle of washing others’ feet—humbly serving other people who don’t deserve to be served. This is the measure of true greatness.

JESUS’ PROMISE (13:17): “Blessed” (*makarios*) means “truly happy.” It describes not so much an emotional feeling as a deep-seated awareness of how fortunate you are. How counter-intuitive! The way to true happiness is giving yourself away in service to others!

We will come back to this passage—but first I want to show you another place where Jesus teaches this same lesson in a more pointed way. In each of the four gospels, Jesus makes this same statement in slightly different ways—read Matt. 16:25. The last half of this verse states the same positive lesson we learned in Jn. 13:17—you

¹ See for example Jn. 4:34; 6:1-13; Mk. 8:34,35; Rom. 12:1-15:14.; 1 Tim. 1:4,5; 1 Jn. 4:7-21.

gain your life (attain true happiness) by losing your life for him (by following him into giving yourself away others). But Jesus also states this same lesson negatively in the first half of this verse. If you try to save your life (by serving yourself), you will lose your life (you will forfeit true happiness and instead experience emptiness and misery). Jesus says these two ways of life—self-serving or self-giving—are two totally different paths that lead to two totally different outcomes.

2 different ways of life: self-serving or self-giving

Which of these two paths are you following? One way you can tell is to see which questions you tend to focus on concerning the following areas:

As we think about the **KEY PEOPLE** in our lives:

The **SELF-SERVING** path focuses on: “Are they treating me the way I want to be treated?” We focus on this question because we believe that this is a necessary ingredient for our happiness.

The **SELF-GIVING** path enjoys being treated well, but it is focused on a very different question: “Am I learning to love the people that are in my life—especially those that don’t love me well?” (Lk. 6:27-38)

As we think about our **FREE TIME** that we have:

The **SELF-SERVING** path focuses on: “Do I have enough time for myself to do what I want to do? If not, how can I get more of this?”

The **SELF-GIVING** path also values free time and uses some of it for enjoyable pastimes—but it focuses another very different question: “How much of this time am I using to creatively serve others?” (Eph. 5:1,2,15,16)

As we think about **GOODS & SERVICES**:

The **SELF-SERVING** path focuses on: “Am I getting all or most of the goods and services that I desire?”

The **SELF-GIVING** path is able to enjoy goods and services. But it focuses on a very different basic question: “How can I become more financially generous—to relieve others’ suffering, help them develop, etc.?” (1 Tim. 6:17-19; Eph. 4:28)

As we think about our **LIFE CIRCUMSTANCES** (the above plus physical health; job conditions; etc.):

The **SELF-SERVING** path focuses on: “Are my circumstances going the way I want them to? Am I getting the breaks? How can I get them going my way?”

The **SELF-GIVING** path is thankful for pleasant circumstances, but it is more focused on a different question: “How can I develop as a servant in every circumstance?” (1 Cor. 10:33; Col. 3:17ff.)

The question is not: “Which set of questions do you ask?” As fallen people, we are “curved inward,” so we naturally ask the first set of questions. The real question is: “Do you have a category for the second set of questions—and are you increasingly making decisions based on your answers to them?” If the answer to these questions is “No,” then this tells you something. It tells you that (regardless of your formal beliefs) you believe that Jesus was *wrong* about this

crucial issue. You believe that the SELF-SERVING life is the path to true happiness, and that the SELF-GIVING life is the path to disappointment and misery. But is this the case? Or is it that because we are fallen, “our hearts are in love with that which will ultimately destroy us”?²

2 different outcomes

If you reflect very much on your own life, then (like me) you have probably already spent enough time following the SELF-SERVING path to know that it doesn’t deliver what it promises. If you observe others over a long time, you will realize the same thing (EXAMPLES). But those who (even imperfectly) embrace the SELF-GIVING path testify that Jesus is right about where it leads.

The SELF-SERVING path leads to *increasing dissatisfaction and disappointment*. You may experience a temporary sense of happiness when you get some of the above (KID ON CHRISTMAS MORNING)—but it is fleeting, so you need more the next time to get the same lift. This leads to a deepening sense of discontent.

The SELF-GIVING path leads to *increasing contentment* with what you have in the above areas—because you know that’s not what makes your life full and meaningful anyway. You often experience short-term joy from giving to others—and you definitely experience a long-term deepening sense of satisfaction.

The SELF-SERVING path leads to *relational failure*. Those who seek happiness through goods and services don’t build close relationships, or they neglect them. Those who do build relationships expecting the other person to love them the right way never seem to find the right person. So they cycle through relationships (“SERIAL MONOGAMY”), or they settle for negotiated selfishness and parallel lives, or they become cynical about close relationships and live increasingly isolated lives.

The SELF-GIVING path leads to *greater relational success*. When even one person becomes committed to self-giving, it radically changes the dynamics. And when both people focus on how to give/serve (Rom. 12:10b) rather than on expecting/demanding, the relationship ripens into something that, while not trouble-free, becomes more and more stable and enjoyable as the years go by.

The SELF-SERVING path leads to *a sense of slavery and victimhood*. Because your happiness depends on people treating you well and/or circumstances being favorable, you are at the mercy of these external factors that are beyond your control. This leads to a growing sense of helplessness and anger or fatalism.

The SELF-GIVING path leads to *a growing sense of freedom*. Because you can always move toward happiness by serving others, you feel less and less controlled by your circumstances or how others treat you. This leads to a growing sense of empowerment in the proper sense of the word.

The SELF-SERVING path leads to *increased emotional problems*. Because your happiness depends on things you can’t control, this leads to a lot of *anxiety* about losing the things you have, lots of effort to control people and circumstances to get a sense of security,

² Michael Horton, *The Gospel-Driven Life* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2009), p. 75.

anger and *bitterness* when people or circumstances disappoint you. Over time, this often leads to chronic *depression* which worsens as people get older.

The SELF-GIVING path leads to *growing emotional health*. Because we are fallen, none of us is ever completely free from emotional problems. But we can experience growing peace and hope (vs. anxiety, control neuroses, bitterness and depression) as we live increasingly self-giving vs. self-serving lives. Lots of secular research bears this out.³

What is the outcome of the self-giving path? It is description of what Jesus calls being “blessed.” Now at this point you could make a big mistake. You could decide to pursue happiness as a goal in itself. You could set out to become a more self-giving person, checking your “happiness meter” regularly to see whether “it’s working.” Some people call this “enlightened self-interest,” it is really another form of SELF-SERVING that turns Jesus into a positive psychology life-coach. But Jesus is the Lord who calls us to not only turn away from a SELF-SERVING life, but to turn away from seeking happiness as the ultimate goal of our lives. He says that true happiness isn’t the goal; it’s the by-product of following him by receiving God’s love and giving it away to others. As Martin Luther said, you must become like a “tube opened downward”—by faith receiving God’s love into your soul, and then by faith passing his love through you to others⁴ (see also 1 Jn. 4:16-19). Like the “elusive butterfly,” if you seek happiness as your goal it will always elude you. But if you turn away from this goal and focus instead on receiving God’s love and giving it to others, happiness will come to you.⁵

Receiving God’s love

As John (Jesus’ disciple) said in one of his letters, you have to “know and rely on” the love that God extends to you through his Son Jesus (1 Jn. 4:16). We cannot conjure up love within ourselves; we must receive love as a free and undeserved gift from God. We must know that God loves us and rely on his love in order to pass his love onto others.

³ See the “Positive Psychology” movement, including Peterson & Seligman, *Character Strengths & Virtues A Handbook & Classification* (New York: Oxford Press, 2004).

⁴ Nygren loosely quoting Luther: “For such love is not a natural art, nor grown in our garden.’ Christian love is not produced by us, but it has come to us from heaven. The subject of Christian love is not man, but God Himself, yet in such a way that the Divine love employs man as its instrument and organ. The Christian is set between God and his neighbor. In faith he receives God’s love, in love he passes it on to his neighbor. Christian love is, so to speak, the extension of God’s love. The Christian is not an independent center of power alongside of God. The love which he can give is only that which he has received from God. Christian love is through and through a Divine work . . . The real subject of Christian love is not man, but God Himself . . . In relation to God and his neighbor, the Christian can be likened to a tube, which by faith is open upwards, and by love downwards. All that a Christian possesses he has received from God, from the Divine love; and all that he possesses he passes on in love to his neighbor. He has nothing of his own to give. He is merely the tube, the channel, through which God’s love flows . . . The stream of love must be directed downwards . . . From above His love comes down to us, and it must pass on through us to our neighbor.” Anders Nygren, *Agape and Eros* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1953), pp. 733-736.

⁵ “Today’s (Americans live in) a cultural climate that preaches the self as the center of a life. But . . . fulfillment is a byproduct of how people engage their tasks, and can’t be pursued directly. Most of us are egotistical and most are self-concerned most of the time, but it’s nonetheless true that life comes to a point only in those moments when the self dissolves into some task. The purpose in life is not to find yourself. It’s to lose yourself.” David Brooks, “It’s Not About You,” *The New York Times*, May 31, 2011.

This is exactly what Jesus did in Jn. 13. Read 13:4,5—how could he love his disciples like this in the midst of his situation? He could do this because he *knew* something. What did he know? Read 13:3. He knew who he was (he had come forth as God’s Son), he knew where he was going (he was returning to his Father), and he knew what his resources were (the Father had given all things into his hands). It is because he knew this that he could rise from supper and wash his disciples’ feet (13:4 “so”). And it is because he knew this that he could do what this foot-washing symbolized—dying on the cross to take the filth of our sins onto himself.

And because Jesus served us in this way, we can now know that God loves us in the same way that he loved Jesus. We can know who we are (God’s adopted sons and daughters whom he approves in spite of our sins). We can know where we are going (to eternal life in God’s kingdom even though we deserve to go to hell). And we can know what our resources are (Jesus’ full authority is with us to protect us and to guide us and to empower us in spite of our weakness).

Do you know this? This knowledge *begins* by receiving Christ as your Savior. But you need to *continue* to grow in your understanding and trust in God’s love. You have to focus on God’s love for you like Jesus did in Jn. 13. Day by day and situation by situation, you have to personally look up to God and affirm with him that because of what Jesus did for you, you know who you are, you know where you are going, and you know what resources you have.

Giving God’s love away

And then you have choose by faith to give God’s love away to others (1 Jn. 4:11). Just as Jesus “washed” because he “knew,” so must we choose to act on our knowledge of God’s love by “washing others’ feet” in whatever practical expression of love is needed. This means that:

You can’t *hoard* God’s love for yourself. If you try to hoard it, it goes stale inside of you and you will wind up going back to the SELF-SERVING path. You have to trust that he will keep on loving you, and the main way that you trust this is by giving it away to others. You have to give it away *daily* to others in order for it to stay fresh in your soul.

You can’t wait until you *feel* God’s love before you pass it on to others. You have to trust his love and “get up and wash the feet” of those whom God puts in your path even when you don’t feel his love. He will engineer specific situations where you feel empty, and call on you to give yourself away (as we’ll see). As you do this, you will freshly experience God’s love, and your capacity to experience his love will gradually increase.

You can’t *dabble* in this way of life, trying it once in a while and insisting on immediate results that meet your requirements. You have to trust God’s promise and sell out to this as a way of life. This is what leads to increasing confidence and satisfaction over the course of your life.

Jesus is saying: “You know I am real and you know that I love you—I have proved this to you. And no matter what happens, I accept you and promise you eternal life in my kingdom. But I have a role for you in my mission, a special role in showing and sharing my love with people I love. And I want you to abandon your life to me and my role for you. I want you to lay down control of your life and give control to me. I want you to make following me the #1 priority of your daily life from now on. I know you won’t do this perfectly, and I’ll restore you

when you stumble—but I want your whole life (BODY; MIND; TALENTS; MONEY; POSSESSIONS; PLANS; RELATIONSHIPS; etc.). I want you to know up front that this decision will result in some pain and suffering (e.g., FLAK FROM FAMILY & FRIENDS; ALTERED PLANS FOR YOUR TALENTS; GIVE UP UNHEALTHY RELATIONSHIPS; PAINFUL TRAINING LESSONS). I make no apologies for this, because I am the Messiah and it is a privilege to have a role in my mission, and to suffer for it. When you suffer in my service, I will be with you to comfort and strengthen you, and I promise you that you will never regret making this decision, that it will be more than worth it in the long run. What do you say? Will you give your whole life to me and to my mission?"

Take a look at the weekly topics in your syllabus. Don't view them merely as separate categories of ministry competence (though they are that), or as ways to advance into greater leadership influence (though they are that). View them primarily as ways of giving away to others the love that you continue to receive from God.

Missions: God's blessing

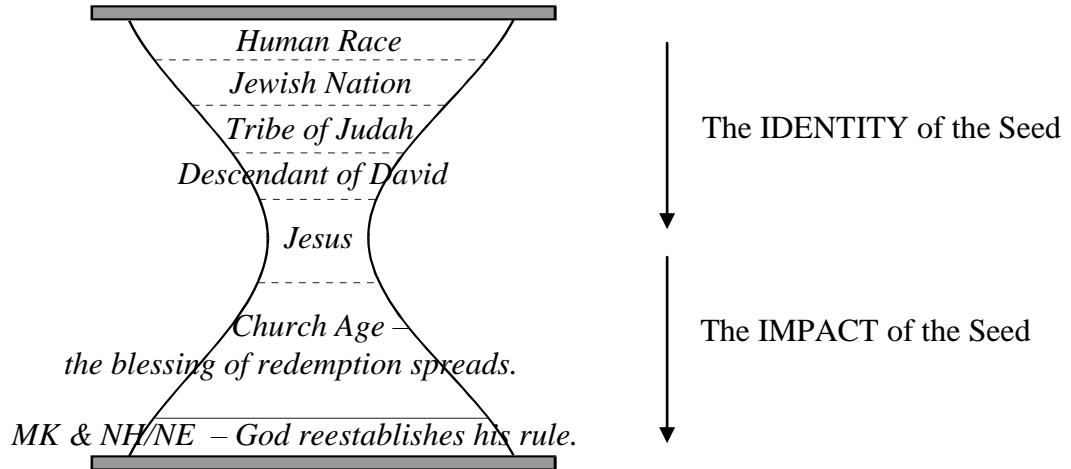
Our lives make sense only in light of God's larger plan. So we begin with a look at God's world-wide plan to bless all nations—usually called "missions." **Missions is God's core purpose for humanity: His plan to REDEEM lost humanity, and to reestablish his RULE through Jesus.** This plan of God is called "the blessing" because God accomplishes his mission through a series of blessings he gives to key individuals in the Bible in order that they may bless others. Let's look at four statements that express the centrality of this main theme of missions:

1. Missions is the central plot of the Bible

In the first chapters of Genesis, after God creates Adam and Eve, a problem arises. Adam and Eve rejected God's rule and chose to disobey him. Theologians call this act of disobedience "The Fall" and it marked the entry of sin into the world. As a result, God drove humans out of his presence.

The rest of the Bible describes God's plan to overcome the problems caused by sin. His plan involves providing *redemption* to bring humans back to himself and ending our rebellion by *restoring his rule*. At the center of God plan is a person the Bible calls "the Seed," a human descendant of Adam and Eve who will *redeem* humanity and reestablish *God's rule* over the earth.

INSTRUCTORS, direct students' attention to the "hour glass" model in the student notes. Have them fill out each layer as you work through the verses below.



The Old Testament brings into increasing focus the IDENTITY of the "seed" (the narrowing of the top of the hourglass). The New Testament explains the increasing IMPACT of the "seed" (the widening of the lower half).

The IDENTITY of the Seed

(Gen. 3:15) “And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her seed; He shall crush you on the head, and you shall bruise him on the heel.”

WHO: One of Eve's descendants will defeat Satan.

WHAT: The "seed" *will crush Satan*. God hints at two comings of this seed—one in which he is injured (though not mortally) by Satan, and one in which he mortally wounds Satan.

(Gen. 12:1-3)** Now the LORD said to Abram, "Go forth from your country, and from your relatives and from your father's house, to the land which I will show you; 2 and I will make you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great; 3 and I will bless those who bless you, and the one who curses you I will curse and *in you all the families of the earth will be blessed.*"

This promise from God to Abraham is called the **Abrahamic Covenant**. It was given around 2100 BC. Note key elements of the promise: a land, a nation, and a blessing to all the nations.

WHO: The "seed" will come *from the JEWISH NATION* – the nation springing from Abraham.

WHAT: The "seed" will *bless all the nations*. The Jewish nation is "chosen," not so that all of its members go to heaven, but to be the people through which God works to bring salvation to all "families" (people-groups). (See also Ex. 19:6; Ps. 67.) As the Old Testament unfolds, this blessing primarily involves redeeming humanity and establishing God's rule.

God repeats this promise to Abraham using the term “seed” in Gen. 22:17,18, and to Isaac (Gen. 26:3,4) and Jacob (Gen. 28:13,14).

(Gen. 49:8-10) Judah, your brothers will praise you; your hand will be on the neck of your enemies; your father's sons will bow down to you. (9) You are a lion's cub, O Judah; you return from the prey, my son. Like a lion he crouches and lies down, like a lioness—who dares to rouse him? (10) The scepter will not depart from Judah, nor the ruler's staff from between his feet, until he comes to whom it belongs and the obedience of the nations is his.

This promise was given about 1859 B.C.

WHO: The "seed" will be a member of the *TRIBE OF JUDAH*.

WHAT: The "seed" will be *a king who establishes God's righteous rule*. "Shiloh" means "him to whom it (rulership) belongs." He will be the rightful ruler of all the peoples (nations).

(1 Chron. 17:11-14) When your days are over and you go to be with your fathers, I will raise up your offspring (seed) to succeed you, one of your own sons, and I will establish his kingdom. (12) He is the one who will build a house for me, and I will establish his throne forever. (13) I will be his father, and he will be my son. I will never take my love away from him, as I took it away from your predecessor. (14) I will set him over my house and my kingdom forever; his throne will be established forever. (2 Samuel 7 contains a parallel passage.)

This is the **Davidic Covenant**, which was given about 1000 BC.

WHO: The "seed" *will be a DESCENDANT OF DAVID* (a member of the tribe of Judah). This becomes the kingly line of Israel.

WHAT: The "seed" will be *an eternal ruler*. God will establish a dynasty through David and Solomon which will culminate in an everlasting King. This coming king is called the Messiah (anointed one). The future King would be human, yet divine (see Isaiah 9:6,7) and rule from David's throne. This "shoot" from David ("stem of Jesse") who is also called "Branch" will bring the blessing of his rule to all the nations (see Isa. 11:1,2,10).

Note: The “seed” is depicted as a king who restores God’s rule AND as a suffering servant who redeems humanity.

This theme is alluded to in Gen. 3:15 (“...you shall bruise his heel...”), developed in the sacrificial system (see Christian Ministry 1, Module 2 on Substitutionary Atonement), and is fulfilled in a human being (Isaiah 53). Although it was not clear in the Old Testament, these two roles are fulfilled in the two comings of Jesus Christ. Zech. 6:12,13 hints that the same person will be both king who rules AND a priest who makes atonement (a covering for sin). See also Psalm 110.

Jesus' First Coming: The blessing of redemption fulfilled

Matthew 1 –

Now we can understand the significance of Jesus' genealogy and why Matthew starts his gospel with it. Note how Jesus' human lineage traces back through David and Judah to Abraham just as the OT record indicated the messiah's ancestry would. Matthew is connecting Jesus to the promises made about the "seed" to Abraham and David.

WHO: The "seed" is *JESUS CHRIST*

WHAT: According to the Gospels, the "seed" ...

- **Is rejected as Messiah by the people of Israel.** The people didn't want a suffering servant to redeem them; they wanted a ruling king.
- **Dies on the cross to redeem humanity.** God sovereignly worked through Israel's rejection of the Messiah to accomplish his salvation for the world through Jesus' atoning death.
- **Will one day return as king and restore God's rule (Matthew 25:35-46).** When he comes again he will crush his enemies and set up his kingdom.

The gospels also record God's plan to temporarily suspend Israel's role as chosen nation and work instead through the church (Matt. 21:42-44). Because Israel rejected her Messiah, God gave his kingdom to "a people producing the fruit of it"—the church. This is why Peter calls the church the "people of God" (1 Pet. 2:9,10). At the end of history, God will honor his promises to the nation of Israel and work through them once again (Rom. 11:25-29).

The Church Age: Our role in spreading the blessing of redemption

Now that God has brought the "blessing" of forgiveness through Jesus, he wants Jesus' followers to spread the news of this blessing to all people-groups.

(Matt. 28:18-20*) Then Jesus came to them and said, "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."

This is **the Great Commission**. Jesus commands his followers to make **disciples of Jesus from all people groups** (*ethnoi*). God wants the message of what Jesus has done to be accessible to every distinct cultural group in the world. This is the portion of the blessing of the Abrahamic Covenant (Gen. 12:1-3) to be fulfilled in this period of redemptive history ("in him shall all the families of the earth be blessed").

The main verb in this passage is "make disciples." It is modified by three participial phrases which explain how to do this. **Making disciples involves:**

- *"going"* (taking initiative to go where the people are vs. "stay in the land")
- *"baptizing"* (implies evangelism and actual conversion)
- *"teaching"* (speaks of grounding, equipping, and maturing believers so that workers are multiplied)

As we share what we know about God with others and see them come to Christ and as we take the responsibility to nurture their growth, we are participating in God's promise to Abraham to bless all the nations! The central goal of this course is to equip you to make disciples so you can participate in spreading the blessing Jesus secured for us on the cross.

(Acts 1:8) 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.

Jesus outlines the beginning of his expansion strategy: ("...Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."). The first century church came to understand this strategy and implemented it with unparalleled effectiveness.

The rest of Acts narrates how God guided, empowered, and at times thrust the Church out to do this. By the end of Acts, the gospel had spread numerically, from 120 to thousands, geographically, from Jerusalem to Rome and ethnically, from a Jewish sect to a Gentile movement.

IMPACT: During *the Church Age*, *the blessing of redemption spreads*.

(Rev. 7:9,10) 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 in front of 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."

John sees a vision of the fulfillment of the promise to Abraham in Genesis 12:1-3 and the Great Commission.

Jesus' Second Coming: The blessing of redemption & rulership consummated

(Rev. 20:4) I saw thrones on which were seated those who had been given authority to judge. And I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded because of their testimony for Jesus and because of the word of God. They had not worshipped the beast or his image and had not received his mark on

their foreheads or their hands. They came to life and reigned with Christ a thousand years.

This is a vision of a future time when Jesus returns and rules on earth, a time known as the "Millennial Kingdom" (more on this later). This is the continued fulfillment of God's promises to Abraham and David (e.g. Gen. 22:17,18; 49:8-10).

IMPACT: After his return, Jesus (the Messiah) completes the blessing of the seed by **restoring God's rule over the entire earth during the Millennial Kingdom.** On the bottom layer of the hourglass, write: *MILLENNIAL KINGDOM – God reestablishes his rule.*

(Rev. 22:3-5) And there shall no longer be any curse; and the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it, and His bond-servants shall serve Him; (4) and they shall see His face, and His name shall be on their foreheads. (5) And there shall no longer be any night; and they shall not have need of the light of a lamp nor the light of the sun, because the Lord God shall illumine them; and they shall reign forever and ever.

Application: When all the dust settles, God will have his way! *Why not let him rule now in your life?*

You and I have the privilege of living in the "end of the age"—the final stage of fallen human history! We know that the decisive invasion has taken place, that we have superior weaponry, that the front advances, and that victory is assured. Yet this is also the time of fiercest battle! Do you view your life in this light???

2. Missions is the prime mover of history, both within the biblical period and beyond.

Since God is sovereign over history and the fulfillment of his mission purpose is his goal, God is working through historical events to accomplish his purposes (Eph. 1:10,11)

Biblical examples (we can't be dogmatic about all of these. But behind the headlines, God is at work advancing his plan in history):

- *Joseph sold into slavery and ending up in Egypt:* Was this merely a terrible tragedy for Joseph, or God preserving his people?

(Gen. 50:20) You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives.

- *God working through Jesus' rejection and crucifixion to accomplish redemption.*

(Acts 2:23, 24) ...this Man, delivered up by the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God, you nailed him to a cross by the hands of godless men and put Him to death. (24) And God raised Him up again,

putting an end to the agony of death, since it was impossible for Him to be held in its power.

Extra-biblical examples (We can't be dogmatic about all of these. But behind the headlines, God is at work advancing his plan in history):

- *The regathering of Israel:* This isn't just a miraculous story of one nation reappearing on the map. God is at work bringing the Jews back into their land for an eventual huge conversion.
- *China under Communist rule:* Was this merely a terrible threat to U.S. security, or was it God sifting the Chinese church so he could propagate it?
- *China's emergence as a super-power:* Is this merely a threat to the American economy, or is God working through this to take the gospel through neighboring Muslim countries?

Application: If we believe this:

- We should begin to look at historical/current events in terms of how God is working through them to fulfill the Great Commission. This includes wars, natural disasters, political unrest, etc. (see Matt. 24:6-14).
- We should begin to look at our personal circumstances this same way (Phil. 1:12-14).
- We should understand that God is prolonging this age until the Great Commission is fulfilled (Matt. 24:14). The Church can hasten Jesus' return by obeying the Great Commission (2 Pet. 3:12). **THIS HAS IMPLICATIONS FOR MANY AREAS OF OUR LIVES, AS WE WILL SEE IN THE NEXT FEW WEEKS.**

3. Missions is the primary purpose of the Church.

The church does many things - it provides a forum for social interaction and place to have fun. In Christian community, people find safety and shelter from the world, families are strengthened, people come together to praise God, and believers are equipped to serve. But none of those things are why the church exists. **The church is an instrument of God to reach out to the nations.** As someone put it, **"The church is the only social entity that exists primarily for the benefit of its *non-members*."**

This doesn't mean God doesn't care about his own. But his care extends beyond them to people all across the world who don't yet know him. The minute that a church forgets this and supposes that He only loves them (and starts spinning theologies that crowd out

God's central concern), the clock is ticking toward the breakdown and destruction of that church.

Therefore, the church must not make its focus: political agenda; family protection; fundamentalist church protection; corporate worship, personal healing, etc.

At Xenos, we are committed to evangelism and missions as the hub around which all other concerns revolve.

Xenos Mission Statement:

God has called on the church to cooperate with him as he reconciles the world to himself (2 Corinthians 5:19). Therefore, Xenos Christian Fellowship exists to help people learn to draw close to God. This work begins by inviting people to receive the gift of forgiveness offered through Christ.

We are committed to fostering spiritual growth by encouraging people to respond to God's love through loving service toward God and all people. Specifically, we direct our resources to serving the family, the non-Christian community locally and internationally, and the broader Christian community.

There is nothing different about Xenos in this regard. We have been blessed by God (in part) because we have continued to obey the light that we have received. That light has consistently moved us in the direction described here. But God is not dependent on us to accomplish his purposes. If we move away from this purpose or shrink back from the steps of faith he asks us to take (domestic work and frontier work and example for others), God will find someone else to use. We will be bypassed in that sense, begin to experience inner "rot" and become eventually an empty husk. We should all be committed to not letting that happen in our lifetime.

4. Missions is the key to victorious Christian living.

This brings us full-circle back to the first section of our class tonight!

Xenos Vision Statement

Xenos has set out to build a highly trained, sophisticated, caring, leadable, cohesive, committed, and flexible workforce of Christian servants who continually strive to serve the Lord and do his will. Xenos has set out to build a highly trained, sophisticated, caring, leadable, cohesive, committed, and flexible workforce of Christian servants who continually strive to serve the Lord and do his will.

INSTRUCTORS: If time remains, you may want to discuss and unpack each of these terms (ex: sophisticated – formidable theological knowledge vs. curriculum dependent small group leader, etc.)

Memory Verses

Matthew 16:25* There are only two ways of life (self-serving & self-giving) leading to two different outcomes (death & life).

Gen. 12:1-3** The Abrahamic covenant, in which God promised to provide his redemptive blessing to the world through Abraham's descendants. Key elements of the promise: land, nationhood, personal blessing, and all the nations blessed through one of Abraham's descendants.

Matthew 28:18-20* The Great Commission, which promises Jesus' authority and presence, and commands us to go, baptize, and teach all people groups.

Assignment

- **Complete the *Ministry to the Poor Assignment*.**
- **Read the article titled "Catch the Vision" and write a one paragraph summary of what you read.**